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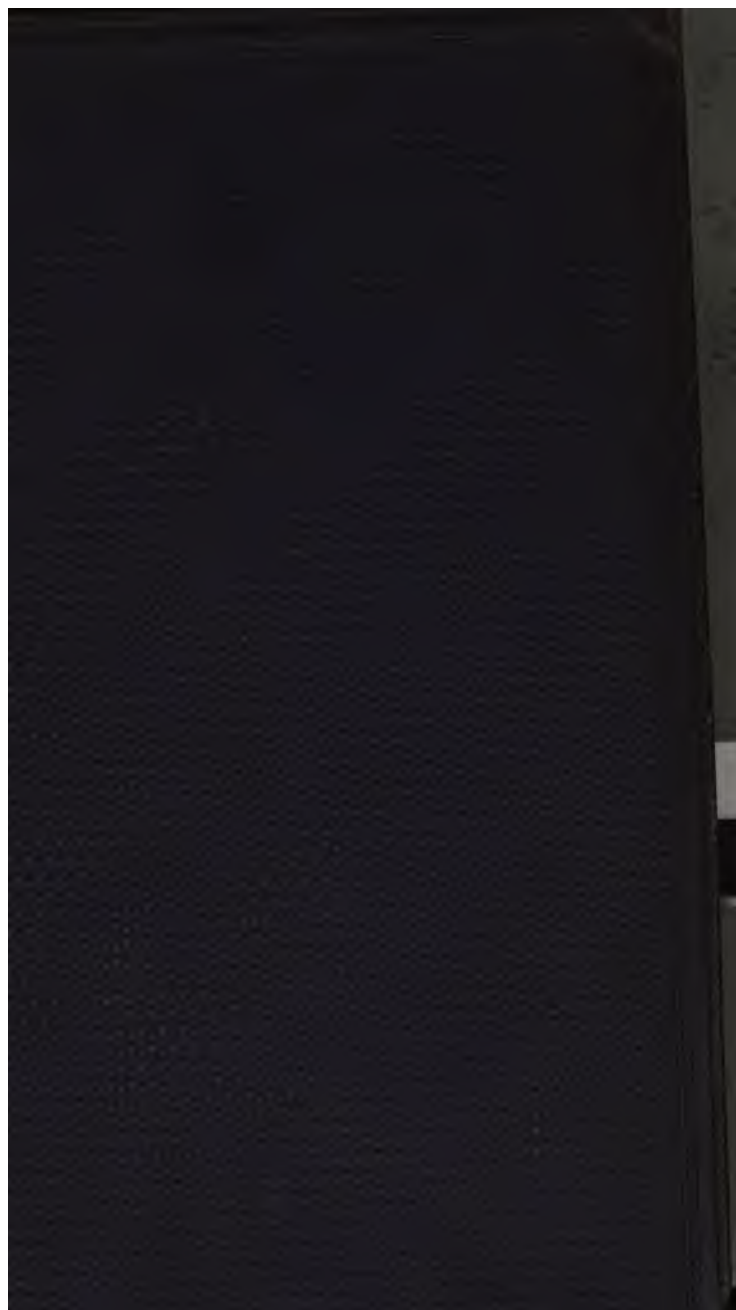
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THOUGHTS  
ON  
PERSONAL RELIGION,

BEING A TREATISE  
ON  
THE CHRISTIAN LIFE  
IN ITS  
TWO CHIEF ELEMENTS, DEVOTION AND PRACTICE.

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BY  
EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN, D.D.

PREBENDARY OF ST. PAUL'S,  
CHAPLAIN TO THE BISHOP OF OXFORD,  
AND ONE OF HER MAJESTY'S CHAPLAINS IN ORDINARY.

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Third Edition, Enlarged.

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TO  
**WILLIAM GIBBS, ESQ.**  
OF TYNTESFIELD,  
THE KIND FRIEND OF THE POOR,  
THE MUNIFICENT PATRON OF ALL GOOD WORKS,  
AND  
A LOYAL SON OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH,  
THESE PAGES ARE INSCRIBED,  
WITH REVERENCE, GRATITUDE, AND AFFECTION.



21, Sussex Gardens, Hyde Park,  
October 17, 1861.

MY DEAR MR. GIBBS,

You have kindly permitted me to inscribe to you this little treatise on the Christian Life. Most heartily do I wish that I had some worthier tribute of respect and affection for one, who has shown me such unceasing kindness, and has been the instrument of such incalculable blessings to my flock. But I know you will believe that my acknowledgment of all that I owe to you is, if not of any great value, at any rate sincere.

We have laboured much and happily together in the cause of the New Church, which your munificence has enabled us to complete and to endow. Perhaps this little book may serve as a memorial of the happy hours so spent in one another's company,—hours which, I can assure you, have been some of the pleasantest of my life.

The leading thoughts of my treatise are so well expressed by a passage from a work which you gave me, that I should like to adopt it as my motto :

“The oftener I read Jeremy Taylor, the more I am satisfied of the excellence of his method of recommending holiness to the heart and imagination, as well as to the understanding of frail man by dwelling on the infinite love and condescension of our gracious Father in taking so much pains to make it attainable, if not easy ; and by mixing it up with every act and duty of ordinary life, so as to make every hour spent in the world, as well as in the closet, when sanctified by its motive, an act of religion and obedience. I have often wished to hear Christianity inculcated from the pulpit on this principle.”—*Sir John Richardson, as quoted in the Life of Mr. Joshua Watson. Vol. ii. p. 10.*

You will, I think, see that these three thoughts,—the power of attaining, under God's Grace, a real, though gradual, growth in sanctity ; the possibility of making the homeliest acts of common life contribute to this growth ; and the expediency of giving to such topics as these much more room than they generally occupy in Christian Teaching,—have been more

or less present to my mind throughout my argument. I have to thank you for giving me the opportunity of here stating the fundamental principles of my little book so tersely and clearly.

There is one point connected with this treatise on which an explanation seems necessary. By those who know what an all-important position the Holy Scriptures hold in the Economy of Grace, it will be remarked as a grievous omission, that in that part of the work, which professedly treats of Devotional Exercises, there should not be a chapter devoted to the study of Scripture. My answer is, that a single chapter could not do justice to a subject so wide and important, and that I have already published a small volume upon it, which has met with a fair circulation and a kind reception. I do not wish to repeat myself in print.

It only remains to add, by way of explaining some peculiarities of the style, that these pages, before they were thrown into the shape of a treatise, have been orally delivered, some of them in your own hearing, in the form of Sermons; but that the subject of them has been upon my mind for seven or eight years, and in the course of that period most of the chapters have been reconsidered and written afresh. Faults, no doubt, many will be found in them; but I trust that on topics of such transcendent importance I have not allowed myself to put forth any crude or precipitate views.

You will join with me, my dear Mr. Gibbs, in the prayer that, so far as it exhibits His Truth, God's Blessing may rest upon this little work, and that what is erroneous in it may be forgiven to me, and neutralized to the reader, through the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I remain, my dear Mr. Gibbs,

Your affectionate friend,

EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN.

William Gibbs, Esq.,  
&c. &c. &c.

## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION.

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I HAVE taken the opportunity offered by the call for a third edition of this little work to add two Chapters to it. The substance of the first of these (Chap. III. of Part I.) is indeed contained already in Chap. I. of Part III.; but it seemed to me to require further expansion and development than I there had space to give it. The treatise in general is an enlarged commentary on the words, "Work out your own Salvation;" and I thought it therefore desirable to give great prominence to the other (and equally important) side of Truth, that "it is God who worketh in us both to will and do of His good pleasure."

The line of thought taken in the other new Chapter (Chap. IV. of Part III.) has been helpful and consolatory to myself in a busy life, and I have thought therefore that it might be so to others similarly circumstanced. The leading idea of it is very beautifully and delicately traced in "*Les Adieux d'Adolphe Monod* (XVI. *Le secret d'une vie sainte, active, et paisible*)," of which address my Chapter is little more than an expansion.

E. M. G.

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Attention to little duties continually recommended in this treatise—and why—ordinary life made up of little things—great crises occur comparatively seldom—Even duties not moral but ceremonial (such as reverent postures in prayer) have their importance—making the responses—attention to little things may degenerate into scrupulosity—case of the Pharisees—two opposite habits of mind as regards little things imported by men into their religion—punctiliousness in small matters quite consistent with the neglect of greater—the comparative insignificance of ritual and antiquarian controversies, and of the decoration of Churches—formalities often adhered to by those who profess to disregard forms—how the spirit of Religion may be allowed to evaporate, while formal regulations are observed—formal restraints as to amusement—formal observance of Sunday—While you use rules as a help, keep your eye fixed on the spirit and principle of them—Love to God and man the fulfilling of the whole Law—view all other things as they stand related to these two great objects . . . 365

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## OF IMPROVING OUR TALENTS.

**"For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability: and straightway took his journey.**

**"Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where**

thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not straved: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, 'thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not straved: thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury."—MATT. XXV. 14, 15—24, 25, 26, 27.

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Misapprehensions which might arise from the moral of the Parable of the Virgins—how the Parable of the Talents corrects them—the character indicated by the slothful servant—shrinking from the pastoral responsibility in those qualified for it—ordination by constraint in the early Church—scantiness of endowments a plea for not improving them—the phrase “according to his ability” explained—St. Paul endowed with ten talents—his improvement of them—St. Barnabas’s one talent—his improvement of it—how St. Barnabas might have acted like the slothful servant—men largely endowed are not generally slothful, and why—the majority mediocre—what motives induce the slenderly endowed to be slothful—What is the one talent entrusted to me?—conjectures as to what it may be—How may I gain from it the largest interest?—hard thoughts of God lie at the root of unfruitfulness in religion—He never calls us to a standard of duty for which He is not ready to qualify us—in proportion to the burden laid upon us He gives more grace . . . . . 375

## CHAPTER XII.

## OF THE INTERIOR LIFE.

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not

so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."—**MATT. XXV. 1—13.**

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We recur in this chapter to the fundamental idea of the treatise—the Prophecy on the Mount—solemn period of its delivery—the tetralogy of Parables, which closes the Prophecy—the Virgins are those who correspond fervently with the grace originally bestowed on them—the flame of hope and earnest expectation—what kept it burning in the early Church—delay of the Second Advent, and discrimination of character resulting therefrom—religion passes into a matter of principle—modern Christians often go on upon the stock of their early religious impressions—decay in them of the interior life of faith—how defectiveness in the Sermons of the day may contribute to such decay—conversion (not edification) regarded as the business of the pulpit—the emblems of the light and the oil explained—so much grace expended on the outward life of the Christian, just as so much oil is expended in keeping a light burning—Prayer the means of securing a reserve of oil—Yet not stated prayer, but that which mixes itself up with all our actions—how in the midst of active service we may secure fresh supplies of grace—necessity of spiritual industry in order to perseverance—our treatise a protest in favour of the interior life . 338

**PART I.**  
**INTRODUCTORY.**



## CHAPTER I.

### ON THE LOW STANDARD OF PERSONAL RELIGION NOW PREVALENT, AND THE CAUSES OF IT.

*"A certain man drew a bow at a venture, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness."—1 Kings xxii. 34.*

No one, however well satisfied he may be with the intellectual and moral progress of the age in which we live, can look abroad upon the state of the Church in this country, without gathering from the survey a painful impression that the standard of Personal Religion among us is miserably low. Doubtless there is a great deal of talk upon the subject of religion. And doubtless, also, as the candid observer will not hesitate to confess, there is something better and deeper than talk,—a certain excitement of the public mind, a general sensation on the subject, which indeed is the reason of its being so much discussed. The interest of all classes is alive about religion ; a delightful contrast indeed with the torpid state of things which Wesley and Whitefield found, when they were first visited with serious convictions, and from which they were God's instruments for recovering both the Church and the sects. But this general interest in the many is quite consistent with a very low standard of religious attain-



#### 4      *On the Low Standard of Personal Religion*

ment in individuals,—low, I mean, in comparison of what might be expected from the motive power which the Gospel brings to bear upon the heart.

Let it be considered that God cannot be guilty of the folly of employing a stupendous machinery to achieve an insignificant result, or a result which might be achieved, and has been achieved, in another manner. And then let it be observed how stupendous the machinery is, which Christianity brings to bear upon the human heart ; that the force employed to sanctify that heart is, if I may say so, the whole force of God,—the force of motive derived from the Incarnation and Resurrection, the force of principle derived from the descent of the Holy Ghost. Let it be remembered that it is the repeatedly declared design of this expenditure of power to make men meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,—in other words, to sanctify or make saints of them. And then let us turn, and look about us, and ask where are the saints ? Is Christianity producing among us the fruits, which God, when He planted it in the soil of the earth, designed it to produce ? To many questions respecting our moral condition, we can perhaps give a satisfactory answer. If you ask where is integrity, where is amiability, where is social worth, where is attendance upon the ordinances of religion, where are almsdeeds and charitable institutions, we can produce our instances. But be it remembered that many, if not all, of these fruits can be borne by unregenerate human nature. The annals of heathenism record numerous instances of integrity and even ascetic self-denial among the philosophers, and many others of a high moral tone and a brilliant disinterestedness among the people at large. Nay, is it not notorious that there were among

the heathen, men in whom the religious instinct was strongly awakened, men of earnest minds who looked forward with vague apprehension, not however unmixed with hopes of release, to that future life, of which they caught a glimpse ever and anon from the flickering and uncertain ray of the light of Nature? But Christian saintliness must surely go beyond this, as being the product of much higher agencies. And where is Christian saintliness among us? Without denying its existence, it may be yet said that none of the instances we can show of it are of a high caste.

Indeed, is it not the case that there is a singular analogy between the present state of knowledge and of piety,—that in this age literature and religion fare much alike? In what were called the dark ages, literature was the monopoly of the few; gross ignorance was the condition of the many. There were some monks and priests who represented all the erudition of their times, and were great luminaries of learning. And much later than the dark ages, while printing was in its childhood, and the helps to knowledge few or none, you meet with men who were great repositories of the literature of the day, giants of intellectual resource. It is not so any longer. Every one knows a little; few know much; and fewer still know profoundly; they have drawn what they know, not from the fountain-head, but from commentaries, and abstracts, and summaries, and indices, and other books whose province is to make the attainment of knowledge cheap and easy. Is it not the same with piety? The great saints of primitive (nay of mediæval) times stand out like stars in the firmament of the Church, all the brighter for the darkness of heathenism or of superstition which surrounds them. But the tendency

of modern times has been to diffuse among many the piety which was once concentrated in the few. The public are religious as a public, but in individuals the salt has lost its savour. Every body can speak volubly upon controversial subjects; but where are the men, upon whose heart the Truth, which is at stake in controversies, is making every day, by means of prayer and meditation, a deeper imprint?

If any remedy is to be applied to this state of things, it is plain that we must first set ourselves to inquire into its causes. And in conducting this inquiry, it is natural to turn our eyes in the first place to the Christian ministry, as at present exercised in this country. If the results of the Gospel are not what they should be, it is probable that there are some defects in the instrumentality which it condescends to employ. If saints be not made by the great system, may it not be that the means of working it are out of order? Now we are distinctly told that God's great instrumentality for the sanctification and salvation of souls is the ministry of the Word; "He gave some, Apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;" (for what end?) "*for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*" Stripping this passage of its beautiful inspired phraseology, and dropping its reference to those miraculous gifts which have now passed away, its gist and upshot is this, that the ministry of God's Word is the great appointed means for the perfecting of the saintly or *Christ-like* character in man. Is there then any flaw

in our ministry, which may in some measure account for the low standard of Personal Religion, on which we have been commenting? We fear there is. We believe that the Christian Ministry having, by God's design and constitution, two arms wherewith to do its work, one of these arms has become paralysed by inactivity. We believe that its office (as regards the Word of God) being twofold, to rouse consciences, and to guide them, we have for a long time past in the National Church (and probably it is the same with the sects) contented ourselves with rousing, while we have done scarcely any thing to guide them. The one object of all our teaching, whether in formal sermons or in books, has been to make impressions, not to give them a right direction, when made. The sermon is thrown every Sunday into the midst of the people, very much as the arrow which found out King Ahab was darted into the host of Israel, to take its chance amid the thousand arrows which on that day were winging their flight to and fro. Often, no doubt, the grace and providence of God directs the shaft to the right quarter, causes it to reach some sinner's conscience, through the joints of a harness of insensibility and indifference, and to rankle there in real and abiding convictions. But the misfortune is, that where such an effect is really produced, both minister and people seem to think, judging from their conduct, that the work in that particular case has gone quite far enough. The impression having been made is thenceforth left to itself; the working power being there, it is assumed that it will work, without any further pains on our part. The minister prepares a similar stirring appeal for other consciences; and the people acquiesce in a religion of good emotions, as if these emotions were

sanctity itself, and not rather something to begin and go on upon,—the primary impulse in the life-long pursuit of sanctity. And thus the good impressions are allowed to run to waste, and no real ground is gained by them.

We have said that a low standard and a wide diffusion seem to be the law to which both religion and education are subjected in the present day. And perhaps there may be, when we come to look closely, a similar defect in the instrumentality employed by both. Popular lectures are one of the great agencies employed in the spread of knowledge. It is the object of these lectures to put in a lively and attractive form so much of the subject as is agreeable and entertaining, and to hide away all the abstruse research, or the abstruse reasoning, by which the results are arrived at. The lecturer is considered to have gained his point if he has skilfully dressed a rather spare dish of knowledge with the garniture of amusement, and sent away his audience pleased and tickled with the conceit of having caught a cursory insight into the bearings of his subject. But as they have never grappled with the elements of the study, the new facts or ideas conveyed to them are forgotten almost as soon as acquired. Whatever advantages such a system may have, it is certain that no scholar was ever made by it. For even now (notwithstanding our intellectual advance) there is no royal road to knowledge; and those who would really and truly know must still submit to the condition of laborious and gradual discipline; “line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.”

But do not the great majority even of good and useful sermons resemble in their principles and objects *these popular lectures*? Do not those sermons

especially resemble them, which it is now the fashion to preach to the masses, and from which we expect some great results, as if they were the one religious agency of the day? If we were to define modern sermons as "popular expositions of Holy Scripture, with a warm and stirring application to men's consciences," should we go far wrong? They are designed to make, and often (under Grace) they do make, wholesome impressions of a spiritual character, and the people who are touched by them go away pleased, thinking "they have got good." And good they have got, no doubt; but then it is good which is not followed up. If the good should go in some cases as far as real conversion, or change of will, there seems to be no provision for edification, that is, for building on the foundation thus laid. They have been exhorted to religion; but they have not been instructed in it. There is in our exercise of the ministry no systematic plan on which people are taught, and brought on gradually towards "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." And the results are most mischievous. Piety degenerates into a series of shallow emotions, which evaporate in the absence of stirring appeals to the conscience. The souls of our people become like Bethesda's pool. Periodically they are impregnated with an healing influence; "an angel goeth down into the pool, and troubleth the water." But, alas! the virtue of the stirring is but momentary; the dregs quickly fall again to the bottom, and the water becomes dead, stagnant, and unprofitable as before.

Thus we seem to have found that one of the causes of the low standard of Personal Religion among us, is probably the want of any definite direction of con-

science, after it has been once awakened. If we carry our inquiry still further back, and ask the reasons why this part of the ministerial work has been neglected, we shall probably find that it is owing to reactions from a state of things wrong in itself. Before the Reformation, the confessional existed as a living power in the Church; it exists still in the communion of the Church of Rome. Frightful as are the evils and abuses inseparably connected with the system of regular compulsory confession, there was at least this advantage connected with it, that under such a system the minister could not forget the duty imposed upon him of directing the awakened conscience. Counsel he must perforce give, counsel practical and definite for the eradication of those sins, the avowal of which was poured weekly into his ear. The Protestant clergyman on the other hand, confined to the pulpit, is thereby, of course, thrown back to a much greater distance from the minds of his flock. He does not know, and cannot know, except in those very rare cases, where a revelation of such things is voluntarily tendered to him, what is the nature of their difficulties, or the quarter in which their trials lie. Hence arises a temptation (though surely not a necessity) to do as the certain man in the passage above referred to did, to let fly his word of counsel without any definite aim, to be general and vague both in doctrine and exhortation. And it is well if the generality and vagueness do not go so far as to become unreality, if the portraits of the believer and unbeliever are not so overcharged as that no man really resembles either of them, and if consequently the discourse, being meant for nobody in particular, does not fare worse than the death-shaft of Ahab, and hit nobody in particular.

But why, because we rightly reject the odious system of the confessional, are we to abandon the attempt to direct the human conscience from the pulpit, or from the press? The Apostles had no confessionals. And yet were not the Apostles ever making such attempts as we speak of? What is the nature of the Apostolic Epistles? Are they not all addresses to believers in Christ, whose consciences had already received the *primary* impulse of true religion, with the view of guiding them in their perplexities, confirming them in their convictions, forewarning them against their temptations, encouraging them in their troubles, explaining to them their difficulties, and generally building them up in their most holy faith? And are not the Apostolical Epistles the great model of what stated Christian teaching in a Christian country should be?—a process, be it observed, widely different from the evangelizing of the heathen, and recognized as different in the great baptismal commission given by our LORD in the last verses of St. Matthew's Gospel, where He bids His Apostles first "teach" as *a preliminary to baptism*,—teach with the view of *making* disciples,—and *subsequently to baptism* "teach" the converts so made "to observe all things, whatsoever He had commanded." Those two teachings are quite distinct. The object of the one was to arouse the conscience of the heathen; the object of the other was to direct the conscience of the Christian.

The state of things on which we have been animadverting is also probably due in part to a reaction from the hard and dry style of preaching, which was in fashion some half-century ago. Some of us can remember the time when sermons were nothing more than moral essays, setting forth some duty, or some



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grace of the Christian character, with little or no reference to those evangelical motives from which alone an acceptable obedience can spring, and no suggestions of any value as to the method in which the particular grace recommended might be obtained. You were told that humility, and self-denial, and contentment were excellent things, and worthy of being pursued by all men; but as to the considerations which alone can move to the pursuit, and as to any practical method of maintaining them under difficulties, you were left in ignorance. But when it pleased God to quicken the dry bones of the Church with new life, men began to see that to divorce the moral code of Christ from His constraining love, which alone can enable us to keep it, was an unhallowed act, upon which God's blessing can never rest, and that the exhortations of the Christian preacher should be something warmer, and more genial, and more persuasive than the moralizings of Seneca. Since that time, with the usual precipitancy of men to extremes, our divines have chiefly busied themselves with doctrine, and relinquished (or but feebly occupied) the ground of precept. The impression has been that people know every thing about Christian duty, and have no need to be enlightened on that head. And if by Christian duty be meant simply the moral law of God, in its outward, literal aspect, perhaps the impression is more or less correct, at least as regards the educated classes. But if by Christian duty be meant sanctity of life and character, and a growing conformity to the image of the Lord Jesus, we must be pardoned for expressing our conviction that our best and most respectable congregations have very little insight into the thing itself, and still less into the method of its attainment.

We devote these pages, then, to giving some suggestions on the nature of Personal Religion, and the method of cultivating it,—a subject for the treatment of which by the ministers of Christ it appears to us that the circumstances of the time urgently call. We address our remarks more especially to those who perceive the hollowness of a religion of merely good impressions, and who feel that, if there be vitality in the Christian principle within them, they ought, as years roll on, to be making progress. The mere earnest desire for a holier life, which is often found in such souls, is something,—nay, it is much,—it is the fruit of grace, it is the working in the inner man of the instinct which Baptism implanted. Take courage, brother! Earnest desire of holiness *is* holiness in the germ thereof. Soon shalt thou know, if only thou wilt *follow on* to know, the Lord. But take one short and plain caution before we start. Sanctity is not the work of a day, but of a life. Growth in grace is subject to the same law of gradual and imperceptible advance as growth in nature. God's natural creation, Moses tells us, was built up step by step out of its first rudiments. Who could have believed that the germs of all the fair objects which we behold in nature were in that void, and dark, and formless earth, over whose waters the Spirit of God spread His fostering wing? And who could have believed that in this heart of ours,—such a medley of passions, vanities, pettiness, ignorance, as now it is,—there should be the germs of every grace which can bloom in the garden of God—of child-like humility, yea, and of heroic self-sacrifice? Yet so it is. Be but true to your convictions. Do but follow the instigations of that Spirit who hovered over the waters of your Baptism. Follow Him in darkness and light, through

honour and dishonour, through evil report and good report, and in due time the new creation shall dawn within thee, and the fair fabric of God's spiritual kingdom shall be built up step by step,—“righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

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## CHAPTER II.

### ON THE CHIEF CHARACTERISTIC OF PERSONAL RELIGION.

“*Grow in grace.*”—2 PET. iii. 18.

IN our first Chapter we spoke of the low standard of Personal Religion now prevalent, and of the causes of it. We assumed that every one of our hearers would form a more or less correct idea of what was meant by Personal Religion, and thus that there was no need,—at all events at that early stage of the argument,—of any formal definition. The words spoke for themselves sufficiently to enable us to follow the line of thought, along which our minds were then travelling. We shall gain, as we proceed, a more distinct and more highly chiselled notion in connexion with them; and such a notion, we trust, the present Chapter will convey.

What *is* Personal Religion? What has been said already will have taught us that it is something more than a mere partaking in those sensations and in that general interest about religion, which are now so widely diffused among the public. We have also seen that it is something distinct from good impressions on the *mind of the individual*, which too often terminate upon

themselves. These, however, are rather negative than positive features of it ; and, having intimated what it is not, we are now inquiring what it is. One positive characteristic, then, of Personal Religion—perhaps its chief positive characteristic—is, spiritual growth—the growth of the individual soul “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” Personal Religion involves growth in grace ; so that where there is growth, there is Personal Religion ; and where there is no growth, although there may be interest in religious subjects, and keenness about controversies, and a perception of the importance of Divine truth, and a warm defence of orthodoxy, there Personal Religion is unknown.

Now to say that Personal Religion is characterized by growth, is only another form of saying that the man who has it is spiritually alive. Growth in the animal and vegetable worlds is the sure sign, and the only sure sign of life. If a branch does not sprout, and put forth leaf and blossom in the spring, we know that it is a dead branch,—the sap which is the life of the tree does not reach it, is not circulating through it. If an infant lives, it grows,—increases in stature daily, while its features fill out gradually into that definite shape which they are to wear through life. But we need not restrict the remark to infants. The bodies of adults grow as really, though not as sensibly, as those of children. Particles of matter are continually flying off from our bodies, and being replaced by others ; so that, according to a very old and often-quoted computation, the whole mass of the human body undergoes an entire change,—becomes, in fact, a new body,—once in every seven years. This constant discharge of old particles, and accretion of new ones,

though accompanied with no change of feature or stature, is growth; and it is a sign of the vitality of the body. A dead body lacks the principle of life, by which alone nourishment can be taken in from air and food, and transmuted into the substance of the human frame.

Now we know that nature is every where a parable of grace. Its being so is the basis of all those beautiful illustrations which are called the parables of our Lord. And in the case before us, nature furnishes a most important parable of religious truth. There is no organic life without growth in nature; and there is no spiritual life without growth in grace. I say, no spiritual life,—no *continuous state of life*. Spiritual impulses there may be many. Impulses, however, are not life, though they may originate or restore life. Here again we resort to nature for an illustration. There is an agency connected with life called galvanism. You may galvanize a paralysed limb, and by galvanism may restore the circulation, and so restore life, to it. But the galvanism is not the life; it only rouses the dormant powers of life. Galvanism is a certain development of electricity, the same mysterious agent which, in another form, darts to and fro among the clouds of heaven. The life of the limb, on the other hand, consists in its answering the purposes for which it was made, in its habitual subservience to the will, in the power of contracting and relaxing its muscles, when the will gives it notice to do so. Now the professing Christian, who is not spiritually alive, is a paralysed member of the Body of Christ. Impulses from a heavenly agent, the Holy Ghost, are ever and anon sent through the medium of God's ordinances into this Body of Christ, and impart a convulsive, fitful motion

even to those limbs which are paralysed. It does not, however, follow that the paralysed limbs are restored. In some cases they may be; in some they may not. At all events, the fitful movement of the limb is one thing, its permanent vitality another. That glowing impression which you carried away from such a sermon, that seriousness which such a warning or such a bereavement left on your mind, may, after a convulsive movement of the soul—after saddening you for a week, or wringing a few tears from you—pass away for ever, and leave you still in a state of spiritual paralysis. Or it may really rouse the powers of life in your soul, may succeed in enlisting the whole machinery of the inner man,—understanding, affections, will, in Christ's service,—may act as the first impulse in a career of holiness. Do not confound God's grace, its motions, influences, instigations, inspirations, with spiritual life. It is on account of this confusion of thought that well-meaning persons often suppose all to be right with them because they are the subjects of so many good impressions. God's grace comes to us from without, in order to quicken spiritual life in us; but the life itself is something internal. The grace resembles the angel who troubled Bethesda's pool, and for a moment conveyed to it a healing virtue. The life of the water would have consisted in its being changed permanently from a stagnant pool into a living spring, which as a fact was never done.

To resume, then, our argument at the point from which we have slightly digressed. The question whether any of us has Personal Religion, resolves itself into a question whether he has in him a principle of spiritual growth; and spiritual growth implies spiritual life. Personal Religion therefore is, in fact, one and the same

thing with the spiritual life of the individual soul.—And now let us turn, at this early period of the discussion, to examine our own consciences upon the truth which we have already gained. It must, I suppose, stand to reason that nothing but a Personal Religion will stand us in stead at the last day. The individual will then be the object of the Divine scrutiny; not the society in which he has moved, and whose sentiments, habits, and circumstances have perhaps reflected upon him a superficial tinge of piety. Society is made up of individuals; and the sentiments of society are ultimately formed and determined by the sentiments of individuals; and therefore God, who searches all deep things, will examine at that day microscopically the little world of the individual's mind. “And when the king came in to see the guests,” says our Saviour, “he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment.” He saw there *a man*; one man,—singular;—not that there will not be found at the last day hundreds of thousands of souls in the same sad plight as this poor man; but to teach us forcibly, by the selection of a single specimen, that no one shall pass muster in the crowd, that not only all, but each must be judged,—that upon each soul in that awful crisis the full glare of Divine Omniscience must be turned in,—that the religion which alone will then abide must be personal, deep, individual. Is ours then at present a Personal Religion? Is it a growing one? Is there a principle of growth in it? Does it wax stronger against temptations, more stedfast in faith, more constant and more fervent in prayer, as years roll on? Are our views of God and of Christ gradually enlarging and clearing, and becoming more adequate? Are they more humbling to ourselves, but at the same time more inwardly satisfactory and consolatory than they used to be? Are be-

setting sins more resolutely and successfully mortified than they used to be? Are our souls, though sometimes stirred by spiritual emotions, like Bethesda's pool? or is the Spirit's agency in them deep, profound, eternal—"a well of water springing up into everlasting life?"

Reader, seeing that on the answer to these questions our all is suspended, it behoves us to be very careful in answering them. Is my religion a growing one? In that word "growing" the decision of the whole question is wrapped up. Mark the point, I pray you, and keep to it. The point is not whether I have very lively feelings, very warm emotions in connexion with religion (those are often constitutional and dependent on physical temperament), but whether I am growing? The point is not, whether I fulfil certain duties, social and religious, with commendable regularity (a reflection satisfactory enough as far as it goes, but not bearing on the present question), but, whether I am growing? And again the point is not (God forbid that it should be!) whether I am coming up to the standard of character and conduct, which I have set before myself? whether I am satisfied with my own life? whether I am as yet near to the mind and image of Christ? whether I am in sight of the goal of perfection?—not this, but simply, "Am I growing?" This one little word is the test, which, faithfully applied, shall reveal to us our state. But how to apply it? how to be sure that we are applying it right? Methinks I hear some reader ask whether this growth is consistent with frequent relapses, with the backslidings (some of them very serious) of which he is only too conscious? To which we answer, with some assurance, "Yes, if the fall have been one of infirmity; if the will has (so to say) picked itself up afterwards,



and, though bruised and bleeding, gone manfully forward, giving its hand once again to the Lord Jesus, and consenting heartily (as before) to His guidance." There may be health and vitality in a constitution plagued with sickness ; and if there be such a vitality, it will enable the constitution to throw the sickness off. We do not for a moment desire to excuse sin ; but at the same time God's people should be instructed, for their comfort, that there is a wonderful economy in His Kingdom of Grace, by which He sometimes brings even out of relapses (as in the case of the fall of St. Peter) a burst of penitent love and zeal, which gives the soul a most powerful forward impulse. The Apostle had denied Christ in a moment of weakness ; but he rises from the denial at once, when his Master's look recalled him to himself, and goes out and weeps bitterly. Soon afterwards we discover that he has grown in grace. We see him throwing himself into the water, and wading ashore to meet the Lord,—a mute but very touching way of saying that his affection is now more zealous than ever. As an illustration of this law in the Kingdom of Grace, consider the movement of the tide when it is coming in. It is *movement upon the whole*. The water is sure to cover that dry beach in two or three hours' time, and to float that stranded sea-weed ; *but it is not a movement without relapses*. Each wave, I suppose, gains a little ground, but each wave falls back as soon as it has plashed upon the shore. Even so in the Christian life, there may be a forward movement on the whole, consistently with many relapses, though this assertion requires to be guarded by the observation that the relapses must be such as proceed from infirmity, and not from malice *prepense*. Deliberate, habitual sin, cannot possibly

consist with spiritual growth ; but the shaking of a man's steadfastness by a sudden tornado of temptation (which was St. Peter's case) may do so. The great question is whether, after every such fall, the will recovers its spring and elasticity, and makes a fresh start with new and more fervent prayer and resolve. Indeed, the making many fresh starts after relapses of infirmity is a hopeful sign of growth. In order to any great attainment in spiritual life, there must be an indomitable resolve to try and try again, and still to begin anew, amidst much failure and discouragement. On warm dewy mornings in the spring vegetation makes a shoot ; and when we rise, and throw open the window, we mark that the May is blossoming in the hedgerows. And those periods when a man can say, "I lost myself sadly yesterday in temper or in talk ; but I know that my crucified Lord took upon Him those sins and answered for them, and to-day I will earnestly strive against them in the strength of His Spirit, invoked into my soul by earnest prayer ;" these are the warm dewy mornings of the soul, when the spiritual life within us sprouts and blossoms apace.

Again, it should be remembered, lest any whom the Lord hath not made sad should be put out of heart by the application of the test, that all real growth is very slow, and its actual progress imperceptible. The seed sown on stony ground, which *forthwith* sprang up, because it had no deepness of earth, proved a failure. Jonah's gourd, which came up in a night, perished also in a night. We never see plants actually growing ; we only take notice that they have grown. He who would form a sound judgment of his spiritual progress must throw his eye over long, not short, intervals of time. He must compare the self of this year with the

self of last ; not the self of to-day with the self of yesterday. Enough if amid the divers and shifting experiences of the world, and the manifold internal self-communings arising thereupon, that delicate plant, spiritual life, has grappled its fibre a little deeper into the soil than it seemed to have done in an earlier stage of our pilgrimage, now fairly past.

Let those characters, for whom they are designed, take to themselves the comfort of these considerations. But let not the indolent and formal derive from them the slightest encouragement. Again we say, that the one sign of vital Personal Religion is growth. There is no growth in a life of spiritual routine, in a mechanical performance of duties, however important, or a mechanical attendance upon ordinances, however sacred. There is no growth without zeal and fervour, and that sort of enthusiastic interest in religion, with which a man must take up any thing if he wishes to succeed in it. There is no growth in the deliberate adoption of a low standard, in the attempt to keep back a moiety of the heart from Christ, in consenting to go with God thus far only, and no further. There is no growth in contenting ourselves with respectability, and declining the pursuit of holiness. There is no growth without fervent prayer, "in spirit and in truth." And, finally, there is no growth (whatever be the hopes with which we may be flattering ourselves) without continual and sincere effort.

But it is now time to conclude this chapter. And we will do so by remarking that if an examination of conscience should show that we are not growing in grace, there is but one alternative, which is that we are falling back. An awful truth ! but one as infallibly *certain as any other phenomenon of our moral state.*

Neither in mind nor body does man ever "continue in one stay." His body, as we have seen, is constantly throwing off old particles of matter, and appropriating new ones. Every breath he breathes, every exertion of his muscles and limbs, every particle of food he swallows, makes some minute change in the bodily framework, so that it is never entirely the same. Of each individual among us it may be said with truth at any given moment, that he is either rising to, or declining from, the prime of life and the maturity of his physical powers. And the mind no less than the body is in a continual flux. It too has its moral element, the society in which it lives,—it too has its nourishment, which it is constantly imbibing,—the influences of the world and the lower nature, or those of the Spirit of God. One or other of these influences is always imperceptibly passing into the mind and effecting a gradual change. And the awful thought is, that if the change is not for the better, it must be for the worse; if the mind is not appropriating the higher, it must be appropriating the lower influences; if there is no growth in grace, there must be a growth in worldliness and sin. Strictly speaking, nothing is morally indifferent; every moral action leaves its impress upon moral character. Our fireside conversations, our thoughts as we pass along the streets to our daily work, our spirit in the transaction of business, all have some amount, small though it be, of moral value; all are tending more or less remotely to form the character; amid all, and through all, we are either making spiritual progress or falling back from the mark. With what solemnity do these thoughts invest even the most trifling incidents of life! It is impossible to pass through them and come out the

same;—we are changed either for the better or for the worse. We will look to it, then, that in future at least it shall be for the better. If it have been hitherto for the worse, we will this very hour embrace that already purchased pardon, which obliterates in an instant the guilt of a whole past career of sin, and that grace, proffered by Christ no less gratuitously, which renews the will unto newness of life. And tomorrow we will, in the strength of that grace, make a new beginning, taking up this anthem into our mouths; “All my fresh springs shall be in Thee.”

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### CHAPTER III.

OF THE ENTIRE DEPENDENCE OF SANCTITY ON CHRIST,  
AND OF THE RELATION WHICH THE MEANS OF  
GRACE HOLD TO HIM.

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me.

“I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without Me ye can do nothing.”—ST. JOHN xv. 4, 5.

THE subject of this treatise is Personal Religion, or, in other words, that “holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” It is evident that we shall be liable to misapprehend the subject fundamentally, unless we have at the outset a clear notion of the nature of Christian holiness. It is to give the reader this clear notion that the present Chapter will be devoted.

*In the passage which stands at the head of it, there*

is a slight inaccuracy of translation, which requires to be set right before the force of Our Lord's words can be thoroughly appreciated. "*Without Me* ye can do nothing," should rather be rendered, "*Apart from Me*," "separate from Me," "in a state of independence on Me, ye can do nothing." "*Apart from Me*," by no means conveys the same idea as "*without Me*." The latter would imply merely that unless Christ concurred with His people in their efforts, they could do nothing. "*Apart from Me*," goes beyond this. It implies that He is the alone originating Source of all sanctity in them. "*Without*" the concurrence and assistance of a strong person, a weak one cannot lift a heavy weight; but the dependence of the weak person on the strong in order to lift the weight, is not the dependence which the word here employed indicates. "*Apart from*" the soul (or principle of life) the body is motionless, and cannot stir a finger. This is the sort of dependence indicated in the passage before us. Christ is to the Christian the alone source of sanctification or spiritual life, just as the soul is to the body the alone source of natural life.

I do not know that any other prefatory observation is needed, except that "the fruit" mentioned in this passage generically is specifically, and in detail, those fruits of the Spirit which are enumerated by St. Paul in Gal. v., "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The fruit consists in certain holy tempers and affections of heart, the possession of which will uniformly ensure right conduct, but which are much more easily seen to be absolutely dependent upon Christ's working than right conduct itself is. If a man be commanded by God to do any *action* whatsoever, he can string up

his will to do it. But when certain sentiments and dispositions are required of him, which involve a thorough change of the heart's natural propensities, that is another matter. The affections are far less under the will's control than the actions are.—That these gracious sentiments and dispositions are called by the Apostle, fruits of the Spirit, and by His Divine Master, fruit proceeding from Himself, the true Vine, need not cause any difficulty. In Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. He is the smitten Rock of the wilderness, through whom alone the living waters force their passage to polluted man. His glorified humanity is the appointed receptacle of Grace, from which Grace emanates into all the moral universe. Hence the Spirit is called the Spirit of God's *Son*.

The great subject brought before us by the passage is, that THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN, LIKE HIS JUSTIFICATION, IS ENTIRELY DEPENDENT UPON OUR LORD.

As regards our Justification, this is clearly seen (at least in the Reformed Churches) and generally admitted. That Christ alone can atone for sin ; that His Blood and nothing else can procure the pardon of it ; that on the ground of His merit exclusively we can find acceptance with God, reinstatement in His favour, and admission to His Presence ; that "all *our* righteousnesses are as filthy rags," and that therefore we must look out of ourselves for a righteousness which can stand the scrutiny of GOD's judgment, and that such a righteousness, white as the driven snow, is to be found in Christ only,—all this, whatever reception such a doctrine might have met with half a century ago, is now so thoroughly *established*, and has gained such a footing in the minds

of religious people, that to prove it from Holy Scripture to persons of ordinary religious acquirements would be altogether superfluous.

But it is thought that, unlike Justification, (which is something that passes on the sinner externally to him, a sentence of acquittal pronounced on him by God, in consideration of Our Lord's merits,) Sanctification is a process within us (which no doubt is true); and hence it is erroneously inferred that it is carried on much more independently of Christ than Justification is; that human will, effort, and exertion contribute very mainly to it, and that Christ is not the all in all of it, not "our strength" in the same way and to the same extent as He is "our righteousness." And hence a false notion of holiness springs up in many minds, and finds such a lodgment that it is very difficult to dispossess it. Holiness is supposed to be an achievement mastered at length—much as a lesson is mastered—by a variety of exercises, prayers, fastings, meditations, almsdeeds, self-discipline, Sacraments; and when mastered, a sort of permanent acquisition, which goes on increasing as the stock of these spiritual exercises accumulates. It is not regarded in its true light as a momentary receiving out of Christ's fulness grace for grace, as the result of His inworking in a heart, which finds the task of self-renewal hopeless, and makes itself over to Him, to be moulded by His plastic hands, resigning, of course, its will to Him in all things, without which resignation such a surrender would be a horrible hypocrisy.

Now let us take up the illustrations of this truth; and first His own illustration, the wisest, profoundest, and most beautiful of all. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine ;



no more can ye, except ye abide in Me;" "Apart from Me ye can do nothing." The circulating sap, which is the life of the tree, is indeed *in* the vine-branch, so long as it holds of the stem; but in no sense whatever is it *from* the vine-branch. Cut off the branch from the stem, and it ceases instantaneously to live, for it has no independent life. Even so the fruits of the Spirit, while of course our hearts are the sphere of their manifestation, are in no sense *from* our hearts; they are not the result of the energizing of our own will; they are not a righteousness of our own, built up by a series of endeavours, or a laborious process of self-discipline, but a righteousness outflowing continually from the fulness of Grace which is in Christ.

Another illustration may perhaps help to impress the truth. When we walk abroad on a beautiful day, and survey a landscape lit up by the beams of a summer sun, our eye catches a variety of colours lying on the surface of this landscape,—there is the yellow of the golden grain, the green of the pasture-land, the dark brown of those thick-planted copses, the silver gleam of the stream which winds through them, the faint blue of distant hills seen in perspective, the more intense blue of the sky, the purple tinge of yonder sheet of water; but none of these colours reside in the landscape, they are not the properties of the material objects on which they rest. All colours are wrapped up in the sunlight, which, as is well known, may be seen resolved into its elementary colours in the prism or the rainbow. Apart from the sunlight no object has any colour; as is shown by the fact that, as soon as Light is withdrawn from the landscape, the colours *fade from the robe of Nature*. The difference of colour

in different objects, while the sun is shining, is produced by some subtle difference of texture or superficies, which makes each object absorb certain rays, and reflect certain other rays, in different proportions. Now Christ is the Sun of Righteousness, in Whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,—the fair colour of every grace and Christian virtue. When Christ is shining upon the heart, then these virtues are manifested there, by one Christian graces of one description, by another of another, according to their different receptivity and natural temperament, just as, when the sun is shining, colours are thrown upon a landscape, and reflected by the different objects in different proportions. But as no part of the landscape has any colour in the absence of the sun, nor can acquire any independently of the sun, so Christians have no grace except from Christ, nor hold any virtue independently of Him.

Let it be clearly understood, then, that the great secret of bringing forth much fruit, or, in other words, of all advance in grace and holiness, is, according to the profound teaching of Our Lord Himself, a constant keeping open (and if possible, enlarging) the avenues of the soul towards Him. If a vine-branch is to sprout and throw out new suckers and shoots, the tube by which it communicates with the stock of the tree must adhere tightly to the stem, and be well open for the passage of the sap. If you desire to see the colours of furniture in this room, whose shutters are closed, throw open the shutters, and admit the full flood of sunlight. And if you desire to see the dead heart put forth the energies of spiritual life, and the dark heart illumined by the fair colours of spiritual grace, throw wide open the passage of communication between Christ and it,

and allow the Life which is in Him, and the Light which is in Him, to circulate freely through it.—But how to do this? in other words, how to fulfil His own precept, “Abide in Me, and I in you?” Ah! vitally important question,—question upon which the whole of our sanctification (and thus the whole of our salvation) is suspended! Let us address ourselves to answer it, with the earnest prayer that God would guide us into all truth.

Observe that Our Lord prescribes mutual indwelling, as the secret of spiritual fertility. Take heed that ye “abide in Me, and I in you.” Here is not one idea only, but two; the dwelling of the Christian in Christ, as the body dwells in an atmosphere, and the dwelling of Christ in the Christian, as the soul dwells in the body.

I. Take heed, first, that “ye abide in Me.” This is done by faith. As we first consciously entered into fellowship with Christ by faith (I say *consciously* entered into fellowship with Him, for when we were baptized as infants, we entered *unconsciously* into His fellowship), so there is no other way to abide in Him, than by repeated exercises of the same faith. The faith which enables the soul to abide in Christ is nothing else than an assured trust and confidence on our part, that, as He has already wrought out FOR us our acceptance with GOD, so He will work IN us every gracious disposition (be it repentance, or faith itself, or humility, or hope, or love) which is necessary to qualify us for glory. It is not enough to supplicate these graces; we must lean upon Him for them, and fix the eye of expectation upon the promise of His new Covenant; “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts:” being well assured that *He will fulfil* to us the terms thereof. There is a pro-

mise, I say, that He will fulfil in us all the work of Sanctification ; and it is well that it is so, by way of making assurance doubly sure, and giving to the doubtful heart a stronger consolation. But even were there no promise, could it be a question as to whether He would form in us those tempers and frames of mind, which He Himself requires of us ? Do we seriously believe that He loved us so intensely as to abdicate His throne in Heaven for our sakes, to empty Himself of all the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, to confine Himself within the limits of man's feeble faculties, and feebler body, to expose Himself to shame, and spitting, and obloquy, and a death most cruel and ignominious ? If we do not believe as much as this, we are clearly no Christians. And if we do believe thus much, is it conceivable that He who has gone to the utmost verge of self-sacrifice in ransoming our souls, should be wanting to us in what will cost Him no sacrifice, but yet is necessary to complete our salvation ? If the soul has the least scintillation of a desire to be holy ; much more, if it is bent on being holy, as far as its power goes ; still more if it is striving and struggling to be holy, and beating against the cage of its corruptions in a great longing for spiritual freedom, as a poor imprisoned bird beats, who sees outside the bright sun and the green trees, and other birds flitting to and fro in the blue ether,—is it conceivable that the Incarnated Love, the Love which bled, and agonized, and poured itself out in death for the objects on which it had fastened, should not meet that desire, that longing, that striving, and visit the soul with power ? As without holiness no man shall (or can) see the Lord, must not Christ be much more earnestly anxious to make us holy, than we can be to be made

so? If we do not believe in this earnest anxiety of His, do we believe in His love at all? Have we ever really apprehended it; or has it been merely a tale recited in our ears, which we do not care indeed to contradict, but which has never at all taken hold of, or touched, our hearts?

Ah! what if these struggles to be holy should themselves be in a certain sense a token of unbelief? What if the poor bird imprisoned in the cage should be thinking that, if it is ever to gain its liberty, it must be by its own exertions, and by vigorous and frequent strokes of its wings against the bars? If it did so, it would ere long fall back breathless and exhausted, faint and sore, and despairing. And the soul will have a similar experience, which thinks that Christ has indeed won pardon and acceptance for her, but that Sanctification she must win for herself, and under this delusion beats herself sore in vain efforts to correct the propensities of a heart, which the Word of God pronounces to be "desperately" wicked. That heart,—you can make nothing of it yourself;—leave it to Christ, in quiet dependence upon His grace. Suffer Him to open the prison-doors for you, and then you shall fly out and hide yourself in your Lord's Bosom, and there find rest. Yield up the soul to Him, and place it in His hands; and you shall at once begin to have the delightful experience of His power in sanctifying.

"Yield up the soul," we say. And in saying so, we of course imply (though it needs to be expressed, as well as implied) that you yield up your will without reserve. There is no such thing as yielding up the soul, without yielding up the will; for the will is the chief power of the soul. Christ Himself cannot sanctify a moral agent, whose will holds persistently to his

corruptions. Even a man cannot liberate a bird from its cage, which likes to stay there, refuses to move when the door is opened, and flies back when it is taken out. God has given us a free will, the exercise of which cannot indeed change our hearts or renew our moral nature, but which *can* say "Nay" to the world, to the flesh, and the devil; which shows that it can say "Nay," by saying it sometimes, when worldly interests are concerned. And this "Nay" it must say, if the soul is to be sanctified and bring forth fruit.

II. But our blessed LORD said not only "Abide in Me," but also "Let Me, or take heed that I, abide in you." He thus teaches us that Ordinance, as well as Faith, forms part of the system of His religion, and especially that Ordinance, in which indeed all others are included, by which He communicates Himself to the faithful soul. In order to the fruitfulness of the vine-branch, two conditions have to be fulfilled; the first that the branch shall adhere closely to the stem, and offer an open tube for the passage of the sap,—this is the abiding of the branch in the vine; the second, that the sap shall rise ever and anon from the vine-stock, and pass into the branch,—this is the abiding of the vine in the branch. Similarly in the case of the Christian. The first condition of his spiritual fruitfulness is that he shall adhere by a close trust to Christ, and keep open towards Him the avenues of faith, hope, and expectation. This is, "Abide in Me." The second is, that Christ shall continually send up into his heart a current of holy inspirations, new loves, good impulses, devout hopes. Or, more accurately, that He shall communicate Himself to the soul by the continual influx of the Holy Ghost. This is, "And I in you." And this communication of Himself is made specially

(where that Sacrament may be had) in the Supper of the Lord ; He comes at those seasons into the opened avenue of the faithful communicant's soul, comes to cement by His own passage into the inner man the union, in which our faith cleaves to Him ; and the result is "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls by the Body and Blood of Christ, as our bodies are by the Bread and Wine." .

Thus a devout and frequent use of the Sacrament appointed for spiritual growth, and as the instrument of Christ's indwelling, is, though not literally expressed in this passage, clearly implied. And it should be observed that the Divine allegory quite precludes the supposition that without faith in the recipient the Holy Supper will avail any thing for sanctification and growth in grace. The vine-stock may push upwards its sap in strong current, at the first outburst of the genial spring ; but what will that avail the branch, which does not hold closely to the tree, which is half broken off from the stem, and the fracture filled up with dust, or corroded by insects ? Christ may offer Himself to us in the Lord's Supper ; but, if the soul cleaves not to Him, if the avenues of the heart are not open towards Him, how can He enter ?

Finally ; it is particularly important in speaking of Christ's communication with us by Ordinances, to recognize the exact position which the Ordinance holds, so as not to estimate it unduly, or erect it into the place which is due only to the Lord of the Ordinance. Be it clearly understood, then, that no Ordinance (not even Holy Communion itself) is otherwise valuable than as a channel or vehicle of communication with the Church's Lord. They are all (even the highest and holiest) so many tubes, through which the sap of

grace rises from the vine-stock into the branches. For which reason, in advocating the devout use of Ordinances, we do not in the slightest degree derogate from Our Lord's honour, nor direct the eye of the mind to another point of sight than Him. It is not to be imagined for a moment that a man by prayers, and fastings, and meditations, and Sacraments, lays in a stock of holiness, which becomes to him so much realized spiritual gain, upon which he may draw in case a spiritual bankruptcy should threaten him at the hour of death or the day of judgment. Away with such ideas, which are a modern form of Pharisaism! These Ordinances are precious and blessed for no other reason than that they bring us into relation, by His own institution of them, with the great Head of the Church; and except we stand in such relation, and except such relation is from time to time renewed, and cemented, and strengthened, there is no life in us. Of faith itself the same remark might be made. There is no intrinsic merit in trusting to Christ, just as there is no intrinsic merit in praying and communicating; but faith is the ordained inward mean, as Prayers and Sacraments are the ordained outward means, of communication with the One Source of Life and Sanctity.

An illustration may sometimes serve a good turn in keeping truth distinctly before the mind. I therefore offer the following illustration of the mutual relations between Christ, our faith, and Christian Ordinances. A woman, like the Samaritan in the Gospel, comes with a pitcher to draw water at a well. Her object is to reach and procure the water; and she does this by letting down the pitcher into the well, and drawing it up again. It is at once understood that the pitcher is not the same thing as the muscular action, by which it



### 36 *Of the entire dependence of Sanctity on Christ.*

is let down and drawn up. Both must contribute to the result; for without either pitcher or muscular action no water could be obtained; but the pitcher is external to the person, the muscular action a movement of the person. It is also clearly seen that neither pitcher nor muscular action are water,—that the arm might put itself forth for ever, and the pitcher be let down continually, but that if it were a dry pit into which the vessel were lowered, no refreshment could be had thereby. The figure is easy of application. Christ is the Well of the Water of Life, from Whom alone can be drawn those streams of Grace, which refresh, and quicken, and fertilize the soul. It is by faith that the soul reaches out after this living water; faith is the soul's muscular action, by which the water is drawn up and brought into use. But faith needs as an implement those means which Christ has appointed, and particularly the mean of means, which He instituted for the conveyance of Himself to faithful souls. These means are the pitcher, in which the water is conveyed. Faith is not a Christ; neither are Sacraments a Christ; but faith (under all circumstances) and Sacraments, where they may be had, are necessary to the appropriation and enjoyment of Christ.

Oh for more faith, more of the principle which cleaves closely in trust, and affiance, and self-surrender, to the Lord! It is not in the use of means, generally speaking, that religious persons are deficient; but it is in that believing use of them, which recognizes Him as the only Source of Grace and Life, and having done His will with simplicity, assures itself of the blessing. O True Vine, let us cleave to Thee with such a faith, so that the virtue which is in Thee may pass into our *souls*, and that we may bring forth much fruit, to the *glory of God the Father!* . Amen.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PERSONAL RELIGION BOTH ACTIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE.

"In the year that King Ahaziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.

"Above it stood the Seraphims: each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly."—ISA. vi. 1, 2.

WE are speaking of Personal Religion, which has been explained to be one and the same thing with the life of God in the individual soul. In this Chapter we propose to trace out the two great divisions of the subject.

We are taught by our Lord Himself to pray that God's will may be done "upon earth, as it is in heaven." The persons by whom it is done in heaven, are, of course, the holy angels. Our Lord, therefore, in bidding us offer this petition, proposes to us the angelic life as the model of the Christian life. And this throws us back upon the inquiry what the life of angels is; for manifestly we cannot form our life upon their model, unless we have some sufficient idea of their pursuits and occupations. Accordingly, the Scripture furnishes such an idea. The veil is drawn aside by the prophet Isaiah, and a glimpse is given us of the life of Seraphim, or "burning ones" (for such is the meaning of the Hebrew word), an order of angels who in all probability take their name from the fervent zeal and burning love with which they are animated. The prophet sees in a vision these shining creatures standing

above the throne of Christ (for it was He, St. John informs us, whose glory Isaiah saw on this occasion); and their occupations were twofold: first, contemplative devotion; secondly, quick and active service. "Each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet;"—this is the Seraphim's life of devotion. "And with twain he did fly;"—this is his life of active service. If, then, God's will is to be done by His people on earth, as it is by His angels in Heaven, there must enter into the spiritual life upon earth two great elements, devotion towards God, and work for God. We will take a general view of each of these. Subsequent Chapters will prosecute the subject in detail under these two heads.

I. The spiritual or angelic life upon earth consists not only of devotion. To suppose that the spiritual life is devotion, and nothing else, is the mistake of the recluse, the ascetic, and the monk. One round of religious service, one long peal of the organ from matins to evensong, one prayer unbroken, except by the actual necessities of the body, and by these as little as may be,—this is the idea of conventual life, though it may be an idea never realized to the full extent. And quite apart from the conventual system, wherever there are multiplied religious services (a great help, of course, if used in a certain way), and leisure and the will to attend on them, there is always a tendency, against which the devout man must be on his guard, to wrap up the whole of religion in attendance upon the means of grace. But the Seraph himself, though indeed the spirit of adoration is upon him always, is not always engaged in direct acts of praise. "With twain of his wings he doth fly,"—speed forth, like lightning, *upon the errands* on which God sends him. Gabriel,

who stands in the presence of God, must come down to the earth, and enter beneath a humble roof in Nazareth, to salute a pure maiden as mother of the Son of God. Another angel has it in charge to descend periodically into the pool of Bethesda, and impart to the waters a healing efficacy, sufficient for one patient. Another is sent to roll back the stone from the Holy Sepulchre, and sit upon it, inspiring the Roman guard with terror, and the holy women with an assurance of the resurrection. Another must pass into St. Peter's prison-house, and lead him out through bolt, and bar, and iron grating, "to freedom and cool moonlight air." Another must shoot down, like a falling star, into the cabin of a ship tossed with the waves of the stormy Adriatic, and announce to St. Paul that, despite all the fury of the elements, he and all the crew, of which he formed a part, were safe in life and limb; while another is commissioned to salute by name a praying centurion of the Italian band, and to assure him that his prayers and his alms had come up as a memorial before God. Thus one and all of them are, not merely adoring spirits, but also "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation." Praise is not their only occupation; they have active work to do for God.

Reader, there is a deep-seated necessity for work in the constitution of our nature. In the absence of regular and active occupation, the mind is apt to grow morbid, stagnant, and what is worse than either—selfish. One of the greatest thinkers of antiquity defined happiness to be "*an energy of the soul.*" And is it not true? Only watch the avidity with which men, even in extreme old age, when one would think that the interests of *this life* were on the wane for

them, catch at some exciting pursuit, like politics. The lesson, which as Christians we should draw from this observation, is that most unquestionably God has made man for activity, as well as for contemplation. The reason why the activity fails in numberless instances to secure happiness, is that it is separated from God, that it is not in His service and interests. This being the case, it too often engrosses, hampers, entangles, impedes,—is as a dead weight to the soul, instead of, as it might be, a wing, and a means of furtherance.

Let every one, therefore, who studies Personal Religion, seriously consider, first, in what quarter lies the work which God has given him to do; and next, how he may execute that work in a happy and a holy frame of mind. I need not say that the services on which God condescends to employ men are almost infinitely various. Each one of us has a stewardship somewhere in the great social system, and some gift qualifying him for it; and if he will but consult faithfully the intimations of God's providence, he will not be long before he discovers what it is. It may be that we are called to very humble duties, duties very low down in the social scale. Still even they are held from God, and constitute a stewardship; and the one talent which qualifies us for them will have to be accounted for as much as if it were ten talents. To regard the business attaching to any station of life as insignificant, is as unreasonable as it is unscriptural. St. Paul says of the human body, that God has "given honour to those members which lacked." The same may be said of society. Its whole fabric and framework is built up of humble duties accurately fulfilled by persons in humble *stations*. What would become of society, and how

could its well-being and progress be secured, if all the subordinates in every department of life, all those who have to play the more mechanical parts, were to throw up their callings on the excuse that they were not sufficiently dignified? How would it fare with the plans of the architect, if the builders and masons throughout the country were to suspend their labours? But we need not reason upon the subject, where the Word of God has spoken so explicitly. The Scripture, with that wonderful penetration into the thoughts of man which characterizes its every page, has taken care to set the seal of dignity and sacredness upon those callings and employments which are lowest in the social scale. Our Blessed Lord, when learning of the doctors in the Temple, and through their instruction growing in wisdom, teaches us that to be engaged thus in childhood is to be about our Father's business. We naturally look down upon a child learning a lesson, and think that it is no great matter whether the lesson be learned or not. Christ opens a widely different view of the subject, when He connects even a child's growth in wisdom with its relation to God: "Wist ye not that I must be in the things of my Father?" (*ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου.*)

But still more remarkable, perhaps, in its bearing on our present subject, is the treatment of the duties of servants in the New Testament. These servants were slaves, and mostly slaves to heathen masters. If ever duty took a degrading form, it must have done so frequently in their case. If ever of any calling one might say, "There is no divine stewardship in it," this might have been said surely of slavery among the heathens. Yet it is recognized in the strongest way, that even the slave's duties may be sanctified by im-

porting into them a Christian motive, and that when such a motive is imported into them, the service is really done not to the human master, but (marvellous condescension !) to the great Head of the Church Himself. "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh : not with eye-service, as men-pleasers ; but in singleness of heart, fearing God : and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men ; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance : *for ye serve the Lord Christ.*" No less truly, then, than quaintly did good George Herbert sing :

"All may of Thee partake :  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with this tincture (for Thy sake)  
Will not grow bright and clean.

"A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine.  
Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and the action fine."

Now if both a child's education, and a slave's drudgery find their place in the vast system of God's service, what lawful calling can we suppose to be excluded from a place in that system ?

II. But we remark, secondly, that there is a contemplative element in the service of the Seraphim,—that their activity is fed from the springs of their devotion. There are two chief passages of Holy Scripture (one in the Old and one in the New Testament) in which we obtain a glimpse of angels engaged in worship. One is that before us, in which the prophet sees the Seraphim, with veiled faces and feet, crying one to another before the throne, "Holy, holy, holy, is *the Lord of hosts* ; the whole earth is full of His glory."

This was a heavenly scene. It was enacted in the Temple, which represented Heaven. But in the New Testament we find the Seraphim domesticating themselves upon earth, in the outlying field of a village where cattle were penned. When the Lord of Heaven, laying aside the robe of light and the tiara of the rainbow, appeared among us in the form of an infant cradled in a manger, He drew an escort of the Seraphim after Him: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The ministry of angels then is only half their life. The other half, which indeed makes their ministry glow with zeal, is their worship. And so it must be with God's human servants.

The activity which flows from ambition, the diligence which is purely mechanical and the result of habit, is not angelic diligence and activity. To attempt to lead the spiritual life without devotion is even a greater mistake than to go apart from our duties in order to lead it. Our flying on God's errands will be an unhallowed flight, if we do not first secretly adore Him in our hearts. A prayerless day of hard work, consecrated by no holy meditation, oh, what a dull, plodding, tramping day is it! How do we spend money in such a day for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not! How does God in such a day deal with us, as with the Egyptians of old, taking off the chariot-wheels from our work, so that we drive it heavily! How, if we turn our mind to better things in the stillness of the night, does the Lord seem to stand over the bed, and reprove all that godless toil and turmoil, which in a



spiritual point of view has run to waste, with this loving irony: "It is but lost labour that ye haste to rise up early, and so late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness; for so He giveth His beloved sleep!" And in these times and this country the danger of the vast majority of men—your danger, perchance, reader—lies in this direction. Activity is now, if it ever was, the order of the day with all classes. Competition, and the cry for qualified persons in every department of industry, are driving all drones out of the social hive. No one has a moment to spare. The strain and stress of occupation frequently proves too great for feeble bodies and sensitive minds. And with those who are physically and intellectually equal to cope with the pressure of multiplied and urgent business, the mind too often burrows and is buried in its work, and scarcely ever comes out to sun itself in the light of Heaven. With a fatal facility we dispense ourselves from prayer, and meditation, and self-examination, on the ground of fatigue, or pressing avocations, or necessity of refreshment. Yet secret devotion is the source, not of strength only, but of comfort, and even of success, in any high acceptance of the word. Success is no success, if it makes not a happy mind, and the mind which is not holy cannot be happy. A good author, writing before the invention of the compass, says,—“Even when your affairs be of such importance as to require your whole attention, you should look mentally towards God from time to time, as mariners do, who, to arrive at the port for which they are bound, look more up towards Heaven than down on the sea on which they sail; thus will God work with you, in you, and for you; and all your labour shall be accompanied with consolation.”

Hitherto we have been founding our remarks on a passage of Holy Scripture, which represents to us the employment of angels. And it may be thought by some that the nature of angels being probably exempt from those infirmities which beset ours, and not exposed to the pressure of weariness or the urgencies of appetite, they are in truth no suitable model for us, or at all events a model which, from the disparity of their circumstances, can only put us out of heart. But have we no instance of a life, both eminently practical and eminently devout, led in the flesh, and under the constant pressure of physical infirmities? Has man never yet attained to live the angelic life upon earth? Indeed he has done so; and the record of his having done so is in the Gospels. There was One "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin," who followed up days of active benevolence, in which He spent and was spent for the people, by nights of prayer. Consider only that touching passage of His history, in which, after receiving the announcement of the Baptist's death, our Lord expresses a natural desire for privacy and repose. The multitudes, however, track Him to His place of retirement, and throng around Him there with the clamour of their necessities, as heretofore. Fallen human nature could hardly have done otherwise than vent a slight irritability at having its purpose thus rudely crossed; but from the depths of that most pure and loving heart there struggled up no other feeling than that of compassion, as He looked forth upon the sea of human heads. Human misery called the Good Shepherd, and He at once responded to the call. He healed all the sick whom they had brought, and "began to teach them many things," until the day wore away. Having fed their minds with Divine

truth, He proceeded to feed their bodies miraculously before He dismissed them, "lest they should faint by the way." And this being done, one might have thought that at the close of so laborious a day, He would at length have sought repose. But He does not so. The pouring out of His soul before the Father has been delayed; but it shall not be precluded. That His solitude might be entire, He compels His disciples to get into the ship, and go before unto the other side, while He Himself upon the mountain offers His evening orison late into the night. And though, of course, no fallen creature has ever maintained the same nicely-adjusted balance between devotion and active service, which is observable in the mind and life of Christ,—though some saints have been (like St. John) characterized rather by devout contemplativeness, and others (like St. Paul) by zealous activity,—yet all His true people have preserved in different proportions the twofold character;—all have been men of service, and all have been likewise men of prayer.

We have spoken of service and prayer separately, as it is necessary to do in a disquisition. Yet we ought not to think of them as independent things, but rather as closely related and interpenetrating one another. Service and prayer are the web and woof of the Christian life, of which every part of it is composed. Both are in the groundwork of the stuff. Not even in point of time must they be too rigidly sundered from one another. Prayer at stated seasons is good and necessary; but a man aiming at sanctity in ever so low a degree, will find it impossible to confine his prayers to stated seasons. He will soon discover that prayer is literally, and not merely in a figure, "the Christian's breath of life;" and that to

attempt to carry on the spiritual life without more prayer than the recital of a form on rising, and retiring to rest, is about the same absurdity as it would be for a man to open his casement morning and evening, and inhale the fresh air for a few minutes, and then say to himself on closing it, that that amount of breathing must suffice him for the rest of the day. The analogy suggested by this image is, I believe, a perfectly true one, and will hold good if examined. The air from the casement is very delicious, very healthful, very refreshing, very invigorating; it is a good thing to stand at the casement and inhale it; but there must be air in the shop, in the factory, in the office, as well as at the casement, if the man, as he works, is to survive. Under this view of it, ejaculatory prayer is seen to be even a more essential thing than stated prayer. Both are necessary to the *well-being* of the Christian life; but the momentary lifting the heart to God,—the momentary realization of His presence amidst business or under temptation,—is necessary to *its very being*. The life is no more, when this work is suspended. For which reason probably it is that the great apostolic prayer-precept is given with a breadth which excludes all limitations of time and place,—“Pray without ceasing.” Ejaculatory prayer, however, must by and by form the subject of a distinct Chapter, which we will not now anticipate.

Reader, our subject assumes, as we progress with it, a more definite shape in our minds. Personal Religion, as we saw in our last Chapter, involves growth. Personal Religion, as we now see, involves prayer,—including under that term all the exercises of devotion, both public and private. Then are we men of prayer? Let the conscience take home this question and answer it faithfully. Let the conscience of men, and of men of

business, take it home. It is a man's question, and a busy man's question, rather than a woman's. Women as a general rule have more leisure than men, and have certainly more of that constitutional temperament, which, when God's grace visits it, inclines to devotion. It is in a hard, busy, bustling life, a life which asks an active and unimaginative mind, and which chills all approach to sentiment,—in short, it is in the life of an Englishman of business habits that the temptation to live without prayer is felt. How then, in your case and in mine, can the searching question be met? Widely as in different ages and different countries the experiences of the children of God have differed, this has been the one universal experience, the one common characteristic without a single exception,—hoary-headed elders, and brave martyrs, and wise teachers, and weak women, and servants, and even little children, “the great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,”—all have been people of prayer. Prayer is the very spot of His children; and the more we know of the power of Personal Religion, the more distinctly will the spot come out, as it were, upon the surface of the skin. Is the spot upon us? Do we enter often into the closet of the dwelling; oftener still into the closet of the heart, to commune with our Father which seeth in secret? Unless this be our case, all our interest in religion is superficial, not personal, and will appear to be so, to our confusion, in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel.

**PART II.**  
**THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE.**



## CHAPTER I.

OF THE MAGNIFICENCE OF PRAYER, AND THE PRACTICAL DEDUCTIONS FROM THAT DOCTRINE.

*"He that cometh to God."*—HEB. xi. 6.

THE Christian life, as we saw in our last Chapter, branches out like the life of the Seraphim, into the two divisions of Devotion and Action. We shall speak first of Devotion, endeavouring to furnish some thoughts which may be practically useful to the reader in his efforts to maintain communion with God; and then of Active Life,—the spirit in which its duties should be fulfilled and its difficulties surmounted. And as ejaculatory prayer is, in fact, the intermingling of devotion with action,—as it is the meeting-point of prayer and service,—we shall give it a middle place between the two, and use it as a bridge, whereby to pass from the first to the second division of our subject.

First, then, to speak of Devotion, which for our present purpose may be all summed up in one word, Prayer. There would be less of formality in prayer, and far more of strength and enjoyment in it, if men did but grasp the idea of what prayer is. But simple as the idea is, it requires an effort of mind to master it; and while we are willing enough to pay mechanically our daily tribute of homage at the Throne of Grace,



natural slothfulness always recalcitrates against an effort of mind. Gradual ascent is as necessary to the mind, in order to its reaching a great idea, as it is to the body, in order to its reaching a great height. We cannot ascend to the pinnacle of a cathedral, which towers aloft in air, without either steps or an inclined plane. We cannot reach the summit of a mountain without first toiling up its base, then traversing its breast, and then, successively, crossing the limits where verdure passes into crag, and crag into a wilderness of snow. Even when we have gained the highest point, we are still, it is true, at an infinite distance from the blue vault of the firmament which stretches above our heads. Still we have a better and more exalted view of what that firmament is; we have at least risen above the fogs and mists which obscure its glory; and the air which encompasses us is transparent to the eye, and invigorating to the frame. Now the law of man's bodily progress is also the law of his mental progress. Both must be gradual. No grand idea can be realized except by successive steps and stages, which the mind must use as landing-places in its ascent. But what if the mind, after all its toil, should prove unable fully to master the idea, as must be the case where the idea to be mastered is connected with God and things divine? It does not at all follow that therefore our labour has been lost. We have, at all events, risen to a higher level, where our view is more transparent, more elevating, more sublime, and where the play of the thoughts is invigorating to the inner man. And now let us apply these reflections to the subject in hand.

Prayer is nothing more nor less than a "coming to God." Now the bare conception of this thing, "coming to God," is sublime and ennobling to the highest de-

gree. But we are familiar with the idea, and our very familiarity with it—the currency of it among religious persons and in religious books—has worn off the sharp edges of it, until it has ceased to have any definite impress. Let us seek and pray that the idea may revive with some power in our minds. And this we will do by a series of hypotheses, which shall be as landing-places for the mind in its ascent.

1. Let us suppose as the first step that we enjoyed the privilege of opening our minds to, and consulting in our every difficulty and trial, the very wisest, and best, and most powerful man upon earth. Suppose that such a person resided in our immediate neighbourhood, so as to be at all times easily accessible to us. Suppose that his doors stood open day and night, and that he had left instructions with his servant never to deny him to us. Suppose that, from his repeated invitations, coupled with the well-known sincerity of his character, we were perfectly assured that he would give his whole mind to any case which we might lay before him, and consult for us to the best of his ability, and with the keenest interest in our welfare. Can there be any doubt that the doors of this wisest, and best, and most powerful of all men would be besieged with applications for admission to his presence, and that even where persons in distress were not immediately extricated by his advice, it would be a great relief to their minds to hear him say, “This is an intricate case, and will require a great deal of management; but be assured I will bear it in mind, and take such measures in it as are most for your welfare?”

2. But the judgment of even the wisest and best men, while in the body, is liable to be disturbed by many influences, which death will set aside. Mixed

up inevitably with earthly interests, and looking at things more or less through the medium of public opinion, they are not now as impartial judges of truth and right as they will be, when separated altogether from the world. Let us imagine then this great separation to have taken place,—the just man to have been “made perfect,” and to be now lying in Abraham’s bosom, his mind stocked not only with the experiences of life, but with the thousand additional lessons which death will convey. Imagine his spirit to be accessible after death (as some foolishly and wickedly pretend that disembodied spirits are accessible) to those in whom he felt, while living, the strongest interest. Let us suppose, to make the image more definite still, that he is a father, who has always had, during life, a word of counsel and sympathy, and a hand of succour for his children; and that it has so come to pass that death has not cut them off from this resort. Doubtless, they would avail themselves of the privilege with great eagerness; the difference between their consultations with the living and the departed parent being chiefly this, that a certain awe would rest upon their minds in the latter case, from the reflection that they had to do with the inhabitant of another world, and that the advice given would be doubly valued, coming (as, on the hypothesis, it does) from a sphere where all errors of judgment are thought to be corrected.

3. And now for another step in our ascent. The Scriptures speak largely of angels, a class of beings whose faculties transcend ours in our present state; and certain words of our Blessed Lord are upon record, which, though they cannot be said to prove, yet, certainly, favour the popular idea of the Jews, that to each person is assigned a guardian-angel. Assuming,

then, for the sake of argument, that such guardian-angels exist, let us suppose that each of them feels a special loving interest in the particular soul under his guardianship, trembles for it as in the mad phrenzy of transgression it hangs upon the brink of eternal ruin, and rejoices for it, and with it, as it is plucked away from that brink by the arm of the good Shepherd, and brought back to the fold from which it had strayed. Suppose, again, in this case that we had each of us some power of access to this guardian-angel, that we could summon him to our aid,—lay our difficulties before him, unburden our minds to him, with the assurance of receiving from him both sympathy and succour. Can it be supposed that we should not avail ourselves of such a privilege, as opportunity offered? that we should never call him to our councils, or submit to him our cares?

The truth is, that both with regard to angels and to the spirits of departed saints, the very questionable notion that they are accessible to us has been greedily caught at and acted upon by the Roman Church. In defiance of Holy Scripture, which gives no intimation whatever of the possibility of such intercourse, and which, even if it were possible, would exclude it, as having a tendency to idolatry, and as being a perversion of the religious instinct, the Romanist still calls on the Virgin, the saints, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, his own patron saint, and his own guardian-angel, to help him in his troubles. A clear proof this, that, if such intercourse between this world and the other were feasible and sanctioned, it would be abundantly practised by all men, that the wisdom and power of creatures above us in the scale of nature

would be called in aid of our ignorance and feebleness at almost every hour of our existence.

4. But we have now climbed by gradual stages to the summit of the mountain, and are left to contemplate a privilege, which not only might be, but which is our own, and yet of which (partly from its very cheapness and commonness) we either do not avail ourselves at all, or avail ourselves in a formal and mechanical manner. "He that cometh to God." Inasmuch as God is the Infinite One, we can never by any reach of the mind grasp entirely the idea of coming to Him; but have we not derived some help, some clearness of view, some apprehension of the magnificence of prayer from the train of thought which we have been pursuing? Created power, wisdom, love, all have their limits, beyond which they cannot help, counsel, or sympathize: our difficulties, our perplexities, our sins, might easily outrun them; and access to them might not be nearly of so much value as we are apt to imagine. But, "he that cometh to God"—what shall I say of this privilege? The tameness of human language is disappointing when we attempt to describe it. Throw into one great sum total all that you have ever experienced, or can conceive, of wisdom and power, the most far-sighted discernment of results, with the most absolute control over them,—the keenest intuition into character, with every conceivable influence for moulding it,—think of a providence not of this earth, which no opposition can surprise, and no device counterplot, calmly and serenely evolving its own designs from the perverse agencies of man, and turning the very arm which is raised to defeat it into a minister of its will,—imagine a Being so wonderfully endowed that

the whole keyboard of Nature, Providence, and the human heart lies under His hand, and, smitten by His mystic fingers, gives forth the harmony which pleases Him; and then invest Him in your conceptions with an intensity of love, which is not discouraged by the deepest moral degradation in its objects, and which clings to the person of the sinner with unchilled devotion even while it condemns his sin with an abhorrence no less than infinite,—imagine such a Being, and imagine Him accessible to man, and you imagine One, to whom in their hour of need all the world, unless indeed the spell of some deadly fascination were laid upon them, would be resorting continually for guidance, help, and comfort. But this is no imagination. It is a reality. God is such a Being as we have laboured to describe. He not only permits, but invites; not only invites, but commands, the approach to Him of every comer. And if there be no promise that every prayer shall be heard according to the exact tenor of its prescription, yet assuredly there is a promise to all who ask,—most simple,—most express,—most universal, of that nourishment of grace for the human spirit, which is the alone support of spiritual life: “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?”

But might we not be reasonably barred from this access to God by a deep feeling of His purity, coupled with the consciousness of our own sin? Indeed it might most justly be so. The Scriptures, and our own hearts re-echoing the Scriptures, assure us that in God there is, by the very necessity of His nature, a deep-seated moral antipathy to evil. “He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” In His holiness He is a

consuming fire to the unholy creature. The rays of the sun, concentrated in a burning-glass, cause any combustible material, upon which they are so brought to bear, to become sere, to shrivel, to crumple, to ignite, and finally to pulverize. Something analogous would be the fate of the sinner who, without mediation, should presume to draw upon him the full notice of the holy God by venturing into His presence. But we know well that God has provided for the removal of this barrier. We know well that the obedience of the Lord Jesus was such that the holiness of God can detect in it no flaw; that His Death and Passion were the endurance by the Righteous One of God's curse upon sin; and that the earliest message of the Gospel is, that both the obedience and the death of Christ are available for every member of the human family, who, without an attempt at self-justification, simply throws himself upon that plea. The way to come to God, and the only way to come so as not to meet with rejection, is Christ. "I am the way: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." In other words, when the soul is to be lifted up in prayer, it must be in dependence upon His merits and blood-shedding. It was to symbolize this precious and fundamental truth, that the primitive Christians wore a white garment in divine worship (which still survives among us under the name of the surplice), thus giving a lesson, as they were fond of doing, through the eye, that no soul of man could appear before God in its native deformity; but that before we draw near to the throne of grace, we must put on the robe of righteousness, which the Lord Jesus wove, and now offers gratuitously to all who sincerely confess their spiritual nakedness and shame.

But it is now time to exhibit the bearing of these

remarks upon our general argument. Prayer is the source and secret of the strength in which the Christian must cope with the duties and difficulties of life. And one most obvious danger besetting the constantly repeated prayers of persons in active life, is formality. Such persons, while too conscientious to abandon the habit of stated prayer, soon find that there is every temptation to satisfy the conscience with the attentive repetition of a form, which takes no hold of the mind, and exerts no moral or spiritual influence on the temper. Every real Christian is well aware that thus to reduce prayer to a form, is to drain away from the exercise all its virtue, until it becomes a broken vessel, empty of power and comfort. But how to prevent, even with the best disposed, its lapsing into a form? The thing is by no means easy, or to be accomplished without effort. This is just one of those struggles which beset real Personal Religion, and which baffle and often make sad the Christian who cannot acquiesce in mere respectability, and feels that God has called him to saintliness. The design of this treatise being to afford help and counsel to such persons, and to lead them gradually onward, let me recommend that special attention be paid to the beginning and end of stated prayers. "Before thou prayest," says the wise man, "prepare thyself." Let the mind, as much as may be, be solemnized, calmed, toned down, by taking in the thought of the presence of God, and the sublime idea of coming to Him. It has been our purpose in this Chapter to indicate the path along which the mind may travel with interest and profit on such an occasion. Endeavour to recall these thoughts, or such as these, with a secret aspiration that by grace you may be enabled to realize them. Lift up the mind gradually,



and by stages, to some apprehension, however dim and unworthy, of the majesty, the might, the wisdom, the holiness, the love of God; and when, to use the Psalmist's expression, "the fire kindles, then speak with your tongue." The ready excuse for not complying with this advice, which springs to every lip, is, "Time; the sort of prayer you describe asks time; and my occupations drive me into a corner for time." To which the answer is twofold; first, that time might probably be gained by a very little of that self-discipline, which surely no man should grudge to bestow on the work of his salvation. Let conscience answer whether, despite all this pressure of occupation, time is not continually *made* for engagements of an agreeable nature? and if made for them, why not for more serious engagements? Secondly; that as in other things, so in prayer,—a little done well is vastly better than more done superficially. Let it be remembered, too, that both the precept and the model which Our Lord has given us, rather discountenance *long* prayers. We are expressly counselled by Him against using vain repetitions, and thinking that we shall be heard for our much speaking, while the compression of thought and brevity of the Lord's Prayer is such, as to make it desirable that the petitioner should pause a little upon each clause, and slightly expand for himself the meaning, as he goes along.

The end of stated Prayers should also be made the subject of some attention and care. It is surprising how little this principle has been recognized in books of devotion. In manuals of preparation for the Holy Communion, for example, how little emphasis is laid, as a general rule, on the regulation of the heart and conduct, *subsequently* to the Ordinance! The natural

recoil from the strain which real prayer always puts upon the mind is levity. Against this levity the devout man should watch and strive. When we have withdrawn into ourselves for a while for Communion with God, the glare of the world should be let in gradually on the mind again, as an oculist opens the shutters by degrees upon his restored patient. The impression of having had an interview with the King of kings amid the ministries of Cherubim and Seraphim should not be rudely tossed off, but gently and thoughtfully cherished. And it shall be as a nosegay of fresh flowers, which a man gathers before he leaves some fair and quiet garden, a refreshment amidst the dust and turmoil of earthly pursuits.

Make experiment of this advice, remembering that in spiritual, as in intellectual discipline, early efforts are for the most part clumsy failures, and that repeated trials are the uniform condition of success; and you shall find, under the blessing of God, that your prayers will grow in life and interest, and will give that bright and happy tone to the mind, without which no one ever encountered successfully the duties and temptations of active life.

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## CHAPTER II.

OF THE TWOFOLD ASPECT OF PRAYER, AND THE NECESSITY OF PRACTISING IT IN BOTH ASPECTS.

*"Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."*—PSALM cxli. 2.

It is observable that our Blessed Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, takes up the subject of prayer twice;

once in the sixth, and again in a totally different connexion, in the seventh chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel. Why, it may be asked, when He was on the subject of prayer in the sixth chapter, did He not then and there exhaust all that was to be said upon it? It is possible that the answer to this question may be found in the twofold aspect of Prayer, which will form the subject of this Chapter. Prayer is a means of supplying man's necessities; this is its human aspect, its face towards man. Under this aspect our Lord regards it in the seventh chapter, where He gives the consolatory assurance that all our real wants *shall* be supplied by it: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." But Prayer has another quite distinct aspect. It is an act of homage done to the Majesty of God. Accordingly it is to be performed with the utmost reverence and solemnity; there is to be no babbling in it, no familiar glibness of the tongue, no running of words to waste, but simple, grave, sound, short, well-considered speech. So had King Solomon said long centuries ago: "Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few." And so says One greater and wiser than Solomon, even Christ "the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God." These are His words in the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel: "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." "Be not ye therefore like unto them." In the same paragraph, He says that the homage is not to be ostentatiously offered, but in the privacy of the closet. Privately as it may be paid, the Father will acknow-

ledge it openly. Observe how the promise runs in this section of the Sermon. He says not, "the Father will give you the thing asked for;" for that was not exactly the aspect under which He was then viewing Prayer; but "He shall reward thee openly,"—acknowledge Thee as a true worshipper in the face of men and angels. The secret homage of the Saints is to be owned *at the Day of Judgment*. Their wants are to be supplied *in the present life*. Both these benefits are the crown and meed of real believing prayer. But they are entirely distinct subjects of thought.

In our last Chapter we rather looked at Prayer in the former of these two views, as a means of supplying man's wants. We regarded it as a pouring out of the heart with all its felt necessities, trials, and burdens, before God. This it is. But it is something more than this. And unless we hold before the eyes of our minds this second aspect of it, not only will our view be theoretically incomplete, (which of itself would signify little,) but practical errors will be insinuated into our minds, against which it behoves every devout man to be upon his guard.

Let us turn, then, to consider this second aspect of Prayer a little more closely. In the passage which stands at the head of this Chapter, the Psalmist very beautifully compares Prayer to the things which indeed were types of it under the Old Dispensation, Incense and Sacrifice. "Let my prayer be set forth in thy sight as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." With this we connect the words of St. John in the Revelation,—*"Jesus Christ hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father."* Every Christian is really and truly a priest, consecrated in Baptism and Confirmation, (not indeed to minister in the congre-

gation, but) to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. If it be asked what these sacrifices are, the Scriptural answer would be,—first, our own bodies, which we are bidden by St. Paul to present as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service:” secondly, our almsgivings, which the same Apostle declares to be “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God;” and last, not least, our prayers (including under this generic term all the exercises of devotion,—confession, intercession, thanksgiving, praise, no less than direct petitions for ourselves). As the fragrant incense-cloud went up from the kindled coal in the censer; as the sweet savour went up from the burnt offering, when it was roast with the fire of the altar; so true believing Prayer, coming from a kindled heart, rises of necessity to God, and steals into His immediate presence in the Upper Sanctuary. We may complete the imagery by observing that the Altar upon which these sacrifices must be laid,—the only Altar which sanctifieth the gift, and renders it acceptable,—is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, in the faith of whose meritorious Cross and Righteousness every prayer and spiritual oblation must be made.

Now is not the view of Prayer which we have thus sketched out very distinct, and very important in its practical bearings? Prayer is designed not only to be serviceable to man, but honourable to God. It is a tax (redounding indeed with unspeakable benefits to the tax-payer, but still it is a tax) laid upon our time; just as almsgiving is a tax laid upon our substance; and if we would render unto God the things that are God's, the tribute-money must be faithfully and punctually paid. This indeed is the inner principle and

spirit of the fourth Commandment. God says we must keep a certain portion of our time clear from secular occupations. That time is to be devoted to the observance of His ordinances, and to attendance upon His Worship. It is true we reap priceless blessings from this observance and attendance. But the blessings are not the sole point to be considered. All our time from the cradle to the grave is due to God. Every day is the gift of His mercy through Jesus Christ. Therefore one day in each week,—and, on precisely the same principle, a certain portion of our leisure each day,—must be fenced round from the intrusion of secular cares and secular business, and reserved for devotion, in acknowledgment that we hold all from Him. Upon this principle the stated private prayers of morning and evening should be offered punctually, as well as under the other view already dwelt upon, that we need something of God, and must go and ask it. Think of yourself before you kneel down, not simply as a suppliant for help, but as a priest addressing himself to offer sacrifice and to burn incense. The time of the morning or evening oblation is come; the Altar is ready; the incense is at hand; the sacerdotal robe of Christ's Righteousness waits to be put on; array thyself in it, and go into the sanctuary of thy heart, and do the priestly ministration.

Now let us consider of what practical service these reflections may be to us, in resisting those temptations, and overcoming those difficulties which beset all earnest Prayer.

Prayer, like faith (of which it is the voice and expression), is a thing perfectly simple in idea, but exceedingly difficult of execution. If you can pray aright, you have mastered the great secret of the spiritual life; but easy as it is to understand theo-

retically what right prayer is, it is far from easy to practise it. The difficulties, if traced to their origin, arise, no doubt, very much from the fact that our adversary the Devil is fully aware of the power of real prayer, and therefore sets in operation all his devices to harass, distract, and disquiet every earnest petitioner. So long as a man's prayers are dead and lifeless exercises, and act as an opiate to the conscience, without exercising any sanctifying influence on the character, of course it meets with no opposition from this quarter; but let it once pass out of the domain of form into that of real communion with God, and it is sure of disturbance in one shape or another,—sure of falling far below the mark which the petitioner sets before him. Consider what perfect trifles to the Christian even the worst trials of life would become, and with what ease the most formidable temptations would be mastered, if Prayer always opened to him the gate of Heaven, as perhaps it has seemed to do on some favoured days; as it might do always, if there were not certain disturbing influences, constantly drawing it down, as with the force of gravitation, to a lower level. One of the earliest of these disturbing influences, of which the awakened soul becomes conscious, is the temptation to leave off, when the exercise promises to be dry and barren, and when the mind is much harassed by distractions. When we fail to derive from Prayer comfort and satisfaction, we become cowards, and run away from the faldstool. We give up the attempt, because it meets with discouragement at the outset. Now this, like most other defects of practice, is traceable ultimately to an error of principle. We have forgotten that Prayer (I am now speaking of stated Prayer) is an act of homage to Almighty God; we regard it

simply in its bearing on the spiritual welfare of man,—on his inward peace, light, strength, and comfort. We become utilitarians as to Prayer, and secretly think that where no sensible benefit is derived from it, it need not be pursued any further. And if Prayer were only valuable for its effect upon the mind of man,—if it had no higher significance than this,—the reasoning would be just. But if Prayer be truly a sacrificial act, an act of ministry on the part of the Christian, a homage rendered to the Majesty of Heaven, then to abandon it in disgust, because it cannot be performed with entire comfort and satisfaction to our own minds, instead of being regarded as a recognition of the spirituality of prayer (which is the light we are apt to view it in), ought to be regarded as a dereliction of duty. It is a peevish indulgence of self, by which God is robbed of His incense.—Nay,—let the rule invariably be this; *where you cannot pray as you would, pray as you can.* It was the quaint but excellent saying of an old saint, that a man should deal with distractions in Prayer as he would deal with dogs, who run out and bark at him when he goes along the street,—walk on fast and straightforward, and take no notice of them. Persevere in presenting yourself to God during the period for which the Prayer ought to last, and would last under happier circumstances. He loves to draw out perseverance in Prayer, loves the indication thus given that, amidst all discouragements, the soul clings obstinately to Himself; and very early in the world's history He signified His approval of this temper of mind by rewarding and crowning, as He did, Jacob's struggle with the Jehovah-Angel. Something obscure and mysterious will always hang over that passage of Old Testament history. But we cannot err in regarding



the Patriarch's words, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," as designed to teach us a lesson of perseverance and resolute determination in our intercourse with God, amidst all the difficulties by which earnest Prayer is beset.

It must be remembered that this quiet resolute patience, even amidst the disorders and distractions of our own spirit, is probably the most acceptable offering which can be made to the Most High. It is an easy thing to pray, when our prayer soars to Heaven on the wings of a warm emotion, and when the Holy Spirit, like a favouring gale, seems to swell the sails which the mind spreads to catch His blessed influence. Prayer is then a matter of feeling rather than of principle. But when we have to woo the gale, and yet the gale comes not, when the vessel has constantly to be set on different tacks, and yet seems to make little or no way towards the shore, it is then that our fidelity in paying our homage to God is tested and approved. And let us be sure that it will not be long tested and approved, before it is rewarded. We shall not long wait on the Lord, without renewing our strength. We shall not long persevere in asking, amid repulses, before He will turn and open to us the treasury of His bounty, and say to us, as to the Syrophœnician of old, "Great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." Yet if the blessing come not in the shape of sensible comfort, resign thy will to God's Will, and that resignation itself shall be an acceptable sacrifice. Thou worshippst Him not for the mere comfort of worshipping Him, but because He is infinitely worthy of homage from every knee and lip. "How many courtiers be there," says an excellent writer on devotion, "that go an hundred times a year into the prince's chamber, without hope of once

speaking with him, but only to be seen of him. So must we, my dear Philothea, come to the exercise of Prayer purely and merely to do our duty, and to testify our fidelity. If it please His Divine Majesty to speak, and discourse with us by His holy inspirations and interior consolations, it will be doubtless an inestimable honour to us, and a pleasure above all pleasures ; but if it please Him not to do us this favour, leaving us without so much as speaking to us, as if He saw us not, or as if we were not in His Presence, we must not for all that go our way, but continue with decent and devout behaviour in the Presence of His Sovereign Goodness ; and then infallibly our patience will be acceptable to Him, and He will take notice of our diligence and perseverance ; so that another time, when we shall come before Him, He will favour us, and pass His time with us in heavenly consolations, and make us see the beauty of holy Prayer<sup>1</sup>."

We have been exhibiting Prayer under its aspect of homage,—the aspect in which it has reference to God's glory rather than man's wants. We are confident that by many excellent and devout people this aspect of it is altogether dropped out of sight. And we are sure also that this defective view leads frequently to a degenerate style of prayer. Robbed of its character of homage, prayer soon becomes an entirely selfish thing ; and the petitioner, when engaged in it, soon comes to regard every thing as beside the mark, which has no reference to his own immediate necessities. It is very desirable to redeem prayer from this exclusively selfish character ; to give it a wider scope and a grander bearing ; and the keeping in mind what has been said of it as an act of

<sup>1</sup> S. François de Sales, *Introduction à la Vie dévote*.

homage and priestly service will perhaps help us in achieving this desirable end. But definite practical rules may be given, which will not be long acted upon, without giving a better tone to our devotions. There are parts of Prayer which *cannot* be selfish, which directly seek either the interests of others, or the glory of God ;—see that these parts be not absent from *your* prayers.

First ; intercede for others, and acquire the habit of interceding. Consider their wants, trials, and difficulties, and bear them upon your heart, as you bear your own, before the Throne of Grace. Intercession is a priestly service. Christ, the great High Priest, intercedes for us all above. And we, if we would prove ourselves members of God's Royal Priesthood upon earth, and perform with fidelity those spiritual sacrifices which we were consecrated in Baptism to present, must intercede for others. It is truly lamentable to think how defective in this point of view are the devotions of the best Christians,—how thoroughly well content they are that the half-hour daily spent in intercourse with God, should be devoted entirely to their own struggles, their own trials, their own wants. So little proficient are they in Charity, and so little—so very little—can they realize the constant “our” and “us” of the Lord's Prayer,—whereby Christ teaches us, in a way more emphatic than many sermons, that we should pray as members of a family,—with the wants, sins, temptations, burdens of the whole family continually upon our hearts. Until we can in some measure do this, we do not pray after the Lord's model.

Secondly ; let Praise—I say not merely thanksgiving, but Praise—always form an ingredient of thy prayers. We thank God for what He is to us ; for the benefits which He confers, and the blessings with which He

visits us. But we praise Him for what He is in Himself,—for His glorious excellences and perfections, independently of their bearing on the welfare of the creature. In Praise the thought of self vanishes from, and is extinguished in, the mind; and therefore to be large and fervent in Praise counteracts the natural tendency to selfishness which is found in mere Prayer.

Think not, O man, whosoever thou art, that God will dispense with this tribute of Praise from thee! Remember that, merely as man, thou art the High Priest of all creation, a little miniature of the Universe in thyself, representing the Angels in virtue of thy immortal spirit, the lower creatures in virtue of thy sensations and appetites, and matter in virtue of thy body. Thus, when thou singest praise, all Creation (in a manner) sings in thee and with thee.

And it shall often happen that when thy heart is numb and torpid, and yields not to the action of Prayer, it shall begin to thaw, and at last burst, like streams under the breath of spring, from its icy prison, with the warm and genial exercise of Praise. The deadness, the distractions thou deplorest, shall flee away as the harp is taken down from the willow, and strung to celebrate the Divine perfections. For how much is there to kindle the heart in the very thought of Praise! Praise is the religious exercise—the one religious exercise—of Heaven. Angels are offering it ceaselessly, resting not night or day. Saints are offering it ceaselessly in Paradise. Nature in her every district is offering it ceaselessly. From the Heavens, which declare the glory of God, and the firmament, which showeth His handiwork, down to the dewdrop which sparkles with the colours of the rainbow, and the lark, who tunes her cheerful carol as she salutes

the rising sun, the whole Creation sends up one grand chorus of Praise to the Throne of God. Thou shalt feel that thou art not alone in offering it, that every act of true praise is social, and, as it were, choral, though offered in solitude. "All saints far on earth, and in Paradise, feel without knowing it the impulse of each other's adoration, and join in with it, like strings that vibrate to the same tone, without touching each other<sup>2</sup>." And the sense of sympathy in the exercise shall kindle life in thee, and the soul shall recover its benumbed energies, and Prayer shall be no more a painful wrestling with thy own mind, but a solace, and a strength, and a light, and a healing.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE SECRET OF SUCCESS IN PRAYER.

"And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."—MARK xi. 20—23.

It is very observable that the remarks which Our Blessed Lord makes on the incidents presented to Him, and His comments on the sayings which were dropped

<sup>2</sup> Rev. Charles Marriott, *Thoughts on Private Devotion.*

in His presence, do not at all meet our natural anticipations of what the occasion required. Merely human comments on what is said or done in society are almost always obvious; and they are so, because they are shallow, caught up rapidly from the surface of the subject, and flung abroad at random upon the apprehension of the hearers. But infinite wisdom—and our Lord is the Infinite Wisdom personified—explores the depths of every subject which is brought before it, and dives into the heart of every speaker, and answers not according to the superficial bearing of the subject, not according to the literal expression of the lips, but according to the hidden harmony, which it requires thought and prayer to bring to light, and according to the intent of the heart.

As an illustration of this, take the words which stand at the head of this Chapter, with the circumstances which gave rise to them. Our Lord on finding a fig-tree barren, which had made a great show of leaves, had pronounced on it a solemn curse. In consequence of the curse the fig-tree had withered. The disciples seeing it dried up from the roots, call the attention of their Master to the fact. And He replies, "Have faith in God,"—and so forth.

Now the question is, What remark would a mere wise man,—one wiser than his fellows, if you will, but still a mere man,—have made under such circumstances? Supposing we ourselves were great teachers of moral truth;—what comment would have risen to our lips on having our attention called to the sere and blighted tree? Possibly we might have drawn from the circumstance its obvious moral—thus: "That fig-tree is the Jewish nation. Its show of leaves is the profession which they make of godliness—'We are

instructors of the foolish ; lights of them that sit in darkness ; guides of the blind ; teachers of the babes,' &c. Its want of fruit is their spiritual barrenness,—their want of practice, while they have so much profession. Its present withered state foreshows their future doom,—which is to stand a blighted monument of wrath on God's highway." But whatever our comment on the occasion might have been, this, I think, is certain, that it would not have been, "Have faith in God." That is not obvious enough. We know that it must be exactly to the point, the precise word for the occasion,—because the Infinite Wisdom said it,—but it requires a great deal of consideration to see *how* it is to the point. Faith, and prayer, and forgiveness, are, no doubt, matters of vast importance ; but what have they to do, how are they connected with, the cursing and withering of a fig-tree ? On the surface we can trace no connexion whatever. And we conclude that we must dive beneath the surface by meditation, and prayer for the Light of God's Spirit, if we would catch the silver thread, on which are strung these beautiful diamonds of holy instruction.

The outline of the connexion is probably this:—

St. Peter's expression was, "Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away."—That was his language. What was the thought of his heart, which spoke itself out in that language ? Probably of this kind. "What words of power are thine, O Master ! Thou spakest yesterday a few simple words, 'No fruit grow on thee hereafter for ever.' Thou spakest them quietly, as thou ever speakest. No immediate sign followed. The earth did not tremble at thine utterance. The vault of heaven did not echo it back in thunder. All things seemed unchanged around us.

The insect hummed upon his way in the morning sun, and the waggoner trolled his song, as he drove past us with his market stores—and we dropped the word out of our memory. But it has not fallen to the earth. Fallen to the earth! no, it was a power-word. No sooner said than done. The word sped to its accomplishment, as an arrow speeds to the mark. The imprecation yesterday;—to-day, in visible and due development, the blight!—‘Behold! the fig-tree that thou *cursedst* is withered away.’” “And Jesus answering, said unto them”—possibly, as if to answer his thoughts, He fixed His wonderful eye upon the speaker, in the assurance that He explored his inmost soul—“Have faith in God.” As if He had said, “My words are power-words indeed. They take effect,—immediate effect. They are not spoken in the air; they achieve something. Little children, ye shall be as your Master. I will teach *you* to speak power-words like mine. Your prayers for good shall speed to their accomplishment, as surely and as fast as my prayer for evil upon the fig-tree. Ask, and ye shall have. Asking and having shall be linked together as closely as the cursing and the withering of the fig-tree,—if only ye will ask in faith,—if only, on the ground of God’s promise made to prayer, you will believe, while ye ask, that you receive the object of your petitions. This and another condition—that you forgive injuries,—that you pray in love as well as in faith,—this shall ensure the success of your Prayers. You, like your Heavenly Father, shall speak, and it shall be done—you, like Him, shall command, and it shall stand fast.”

Such is the connexion of thought between our Lord’s words and the occasion which gave rise to them. Let us now learn from them the secret of successful prayer.



Prayer is, without doubt, the great means of advance in Personal Religion and the spiritual life. But it is surprising, and most disheartening, how very little proportion the progress of religious persons bears to their prayers. Were the prayers formal,—that is, were they said without seriousness and attention, and without any corresponding effort to amend the life, of course the account of this barrenness would be obvious. But this is by no means the case. The petitioner, in the case which we are supposing, seriously and earnestly desires spiritual blessings. He gives serious and close attention to the words which he employs in prayer. He strives to realize, when he employs them, the awful Presence of God. Yet somehow or other the prayer is not so successful as it should be. It may calm his mind, quiet his spirit, spread a general sensation of happiness over his soul; these are what I may call the natural influences of Prayer; but it does not seem that he is substantially the better for it. There is a great mass of Prayer, and very little sensible improvement,—very little growth in grace. Years roll on; and his character is still very stagnant in any spiritual view of it; excellent, upright, and devout as far as man can mark, he has not made much progress in Divine things. The many, many words of Prayer seem spoken in the air; they are sent forth into the vast world of spirits, like Noah's raven from the ark, never to return again.

Is this true as a general description, if not to the full extent, of any one who reads these lines? Then let me invite such a person to consider the secret of successful Prayer, as explained by our Lord Himself. May it not be that your words are not words of power, because they are not words of Faith? You pray rather as a duty, than in the definite expectation of any thing

to be gained by it. You pray attentively, seriously, devoutly ; and you go your way with a feeling of satisfaction that you have done well upon the whole, and there the matter ends. In the ancient augury by birds, as soon as the augur had made the preliminary arrangements,—covered his head, marked out the heavens with his staff, and uttered his prayer,—he stayed on the spot, watching for the first appearance of the birds,—he was on the look out for the result. But this is just what many Christians fail to do in regard of their prayers ; they have no expectation of being benefited by them ; they do not look for the blessing to which, in virtue of God's promise in Christ Jesus, the prayer entitles them. If, some day, after praying for the Light of God's Spirit, they were to find in the study of His Word a wonderful clearing up of things which had been dark before, and a lucid apprehension of Divine Truth, they would be inwardly surprised, from the mental habit of disconnecting Prayer with its effect, and would say, "What do I owe this to?" Now what would this surprise argue? What does the want of expectation that good will result to us from our prayers prove respecting our state of mind? Surely that we have no definite belief that the blessing will be granted,—in a word, no faith in God's promise, which connects Prayer with the answer to Prayer,—the word with the power. The Scriptures lead us to suppose that there is no height of holiness to which, in the might of God's Spirit, we cannot attain. There is no reason why we should not be so full of love and zeal,—why our souls should not be so penetrated at all times with a sense of Christ's Love and Presence, that we should breathe habitually the element of praise, and that every meal should become a Sacrament. I say there is no reason,

except such as resides in ourselves. And the difficulties which reside in ourselves, and result from our corrupt nature, hard heart, stubborn will, and so forth, the Spirit of God *has* overcome in numberless instances of saints of old, and *may* overcome in us. "Is the Lord's arm shortened, that it cannot save; or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear?" "The power that worketh in us" is, as we read, "able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." This is admitted in theory by all. But now, when we come to pray, and to set before us this high standard of holiness as an object of ambition, a subtle unbelief rises and spreads like leaven in the heart. We have no notion (the truth had better be told candidly) that God either will or can make *us* eminent saints. Perhaps He may help us a little to overcome this evil temper, to rid ourselves of that bad habit, and may make us, very gradually indeed, fair average Christians; but as for any great progress, any high pinnacle of virtue, that is out of the question with our temptations and under our circumstances. We have not leisure enough. We have not time enough for prayer; and we cannot get time. Our passions are strong and in their heyday. The least cross turn of things in the day upsets our temper. We are men hurried with engagements, all hot with a thousand secular interests; or we have a mighty passion for human praise and the laurels of earthly distinction: you cannot make saints out of that material. It is an impossibility. You might as well advance to the brink of one of the lakes that lie embosomed in Alpine scenery, and command the enormous granite mountains that tower above you to descend and cast themselves into the sea. They would not answer you. There would be neither voice nor

hearing. And the evil tempers and corrupt inclinations will not answer us, when in the might of Prayer we command them to come out. Something like this is too often the secret process of our hearts, when we kneel down to pray. Now I am not going to plead for a fanatical view of answers to Prayer. I have no great faith in sudden revulsions of feeling, or instantaneous conversions. I know full well that growth in Grace, as in Nature, may be so rapid as to be unhealthily rapid, as to indicate shallowness and want of depth. But one thing I do believe,—to disbelieve which were the most unreasonable of all follies,—to believe which is the dictate of the calmest, soberest, purest, highest reason. One thing I do believe,—more surely than the evidence of the senses, for they may be imposed upon;—more surely than those self-evident axioms, upon which mathematical truth is built, for those axioms are only spun out of the human mind, and not external to it. I do believe that GOD IS TRUE. I do believe that whenever God makes a promise, He will assuredly fulfil it. I do believe that if you or I come under the terms of the promise, He will fulfil it to us. I see that He has promised the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him; and it were blasphemous not to believe that the Holy Spirit is able to surmount any and every difficulty.

Therefore if I have ever secretly reasoned as above, if such has ever been the secret process of my heart, I stand convicted of unbelief. It is no marvel that God has withheld the blessing, if I so dishonoured Him in my heart as never seriously to believe that He could or would bestow it. And, in future, if I would meet with success, I must come to the Throne of Grace with *an undoubting mind*. Having launched my petition into

the world of spirits, I must stand (like good Habakkuk) upon the watch, and set me upon the tower, and must watch to see what He will say to me. Having prayed "Show me a token for good," I must wait, like the augurs, looking up to Heaven until the token comes. I must in the depth of my inmost heart expect to receive what I ask for. And then if, besides this, my prayer be a prayer of Love,—if, while I breathe it, my heart goes forth on an errand of forgiveness towards the man who has thwarted or striven to injure me,—then *the answer cannot long tarry*. The prayer-word must in that case be a power-word. The effect must be in that case as surely linked to the petition as the blighting of the fig-tree was linked to the Saviour's malediction. "Though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come; it will not tarry."

Before concluding this Chapter, we will give one simple piece of advice, by way of rendering more practical what has been said.

Strive to acquire the habit of asking definitely for particular graces of which you stand in need, and of expecting a definite result. For example; what point of character was it in which you found yourself most deficient in the examination which preceded your last Communion? Until the next Communion comes round, let that particular grace, whether it was purity, or humility, or patience, or zeal, or love, be made the subject of a distinct petition in your prayers. Do not forget the petition; always have it in your mind's eye; try to expect the result,—to assure yourself, on grounds of simple reason, that, as you have sown, so you will, in due season, reap.

Some may ask, and it is well that they should have a distinct and unequivocal answer,—“Where is my

warrant for believing that?" There are many warrants. We will take that which seems least capable of being evaded. It occurs in Luke xi. 13. Read it over before you make your daily petition, and remember that, whatever else may be false, this must be true.

"IF YE THEN, BEING EVIL, KNOW HOW TO GIVE GOOD GIFTS UNTO YOUR CHILDREN: HOW MUCH MORE SHALL YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER GIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO THEM THAT ASK HIM?"

It will be admitted that if, after saying *that*, God were to withhold the Holy Spirit from those that ask Him, He would be raising expectations which would be disappointed,—a thing plainly abhorrent to His character. I must also call particular attention to the fact, that the one only condition which this promise contemplates, in the persons to whom it is addressed,—is the asking. If you ask, then, clearly and beyond the shadow of a doubt you are entitled to receive. You may be very sinful at present, very weak, very different in many respects from what you wish to be; that is all beside the mark. The terms of the promise under which you must come, if you desire its fulfilment, are not that you shall be holy, but *only that you shall be an asker*.

Glorious promise! so sublime! "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children" (why, we know that the tenderness and love of human parents is proverbial): "how much more shall your heavenly Father give"—Give what? Health, and freedom from pain, and a sound mind in a sound body? Good things these; but He will give something better. What then? Long life, and many days? Ah! it might be only a relief of heart to thee;—no, something better. Large store of silver and gold, flocks and herds, and great

worldly well-being?—Ah! the canker of self-indulgence might convert it all into a curse;—no, something better. Lofty distinction, high posts, crowns, and empires, and a great name,—all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them? Nay, better, much better. “THE HOLY SPIRIT,” to be the soul of thy soul, to new-create thy moral nature in the Image of God, to dwell in thee and walk in thee, making thy heart His shrine; a present stream of joy, and strength, and consolation, springing up into everlasting life;—“how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?” Glorious promise! so free! Free as the air of heaven to those who will but come forth and breathe it. Free as the rivers of the earth to those who will but dip a cup in them, and slake their thirst. Then come forthwith, and claim this mighty Boon. Come with strong desire. Let the heart speak, rather than the mouth. Come in stedfast faith, fastening the whole soul upon that solemn asseveration,—“Yea, let God be true, and every man a liar!” And lo! your word is a word of power. It has unlocked Heaven. Before you call, He answers; and while you are yet speaking, He hears.

## CHAPTER IV.

## OF SELF-EXAMINATION.

"And the Lord sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children: it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock, and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man."—  
2 SAM. xii. 1—7.

IN this striking passage of Holy Scripture we see King David in disguise brought before his own judgment-seat. His judgment, as chief magistrate of his realm, is demanded upon an imaginary case of wanton and cruel oppression, the exact counterpart of that which he had himself committed. David, not recognizing himself under the disguise which the prophet had thrown over him, passes sentence of death and fourfold restitution upon the imaginary offender. No sooner had the sentence gone out of the king's mouth than the prophet unmasks the muffled and mysterious figure which stood at the bar, tears away the disguise, and shows to the astonished king himself: "Thou art



the man." How came it to pass that David was so incensed with cruelty and oppression in a supposed case, though he had remained so long (since his child was born when Nathan came to him, it cannot have been much short of a year) insensible to the far more heinous cruelty and oppression of his own conduct? The reason is, of course, that we never judge of our own conduct in any affair, as we do of an abstract case in which we are not ourselves mixed up, and in which our feelings, passions, and prejudices are not interested. Moralists have questioned, and there seems every reason to question, whether a man *can* do a bad action without justifying it to his own conscience as at least excusable under the circumstances,—or, in other words, whether evil, without a certain colour, pretext, and palliation, can ever be accepted by the human will; but the colours and pretexts which serve for our own conduct are never available for that of other men. We judge *them*, as David judged the imaginary offender in the parable, nakedly, truly, and severely enough.

It is the object of these pages to give some thoughts, which may be practically useful on the subject of Personal Religion. Now the chief devotional exercise which turns Religion into a personal thing, which brings it home to men's business and bosom, is Self-examination. A man's religion cannot well be one of merely good impressions,—the staple of it cannot well be an evaporating sentiment, if he have acquired the habit of honestly and candidly looking within. The subject, therefore, which we treat to-day, has the closest bearing upon the general argument of the work.

Self-examination may be called an arraignment of ourselves at our own bar, according to that word of our Eucharistic Service: "Judge therefore yourselves,

brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord." It is an exercise most essential to our spiritual health ; and the more earnestly to be pressed on all Protestants, because there exists in the Reformed Churches no security but that of right principle for its ever being practised. In the Roman Church you are aware it is otherwise. The system of the confessional, with all its evils and abominations, may at least fairly lay claim to the advantage of exacting a certain amount of introspection from those who honestly conform to it. We who have not this check, and among whom the work of probing the conscience with the Word of God is done from the pulpit, must at least see to it that we make such work personal, by applying to ourselves in Self-examination the Sermons which we hear and read.

It is easy,—fatally easy,—with Self-examination as with Prayer, to allow the exercise to be drawn down from its high moral and spiritual aim to the level of a form. A string of questions put to the conscience every evening before our evening prayer, never varying with the circumstances of the day, turning principally upon outward conduct, and answered almost mechanically—this, if the truth must be confessed, is what the Self-examination of devout and well-intentioned people too often reduces itself to. Not that we at all counsel the abandonment of such a practice, where it is done with real seriousness and attention. It is almost a principle of the spiritual life that ground is never gained, always lost, by giving up forms through a dread of formality ; the way to gain ground is to quicken and vitalize the forms. Nightly examination of the conscience is any how a safeguard for the performance of the duty, and a most excellent preparative for evening prayer. But while we continue it, let us strive to

throw reality and life into it by regarding the great duty on a large, comprehensive, and spiritual scale.

Consider first, the necessity for all of us, in respect both of our sins and of our good works, of an exercise like Self-examination. This necessity arises from the fact, so distinctly stated in Scripture, that "the heart is deceitful above all things," and that "he that trusteth in his own heart,"—in its dictates respecting himself and his own spiritual condition,—*"is a fool."* It has pleased God to illustrate this cardinal truth by two grand examples, one in the Old and one in the New Testament. It must have been by trust in the subtle evasions and plausible shifts of his own heart, that David, after committing two of the worst crimes of which our nature is capable, so long contrived to keep his conscience quiet, but at length was convicted of the desperate folly of severely condemning in another man the very faults, which, in an infinitely aggravated form, he had been palliating and excusing in himself. And it was by trusting in the assurances which his heart gave him of his own strong attachment to his Master, that St. Peter, secure of himself, was betrayed into the weakness and folly of denying Christ.

May we say that, while all characters are liable to the snare of self-deception, those are more particularly exposed to it, who, like St. Peter and David, are persons of keen sensibilities, warm temperaments, quick affections? Probably we may; for affectionateness of disposition readily commends itself to the conscience as a thing which cannot be wrong, and secretly whispers to one, who is conscious of possessing it, *"This generous trait in you will cover and excuse many sins."* An acrid, soured character cannot flatter itself that it is right with half the facility of a warm and genial cha-

acter. A man, who sins by passions the reverse of malignant, is apt to thank God secretly that he is not malignant, totally forgetting that, although not malignant, he follows his own impulses as entirely, and so is as purely selfish as the malignant man.

But how shall we bring home to ourselves the dangerousness of trusting, without due examination, to the verdict of our own hearts? We will do so by supposing a parallel case in a matter, where we are all peculiarly apt to be cautious and suspicious,—the goods of this world. Suppose then (and, in a commercial country like this, the supposition has been not unfrequently realized) that the chief agent in some great speculation is a man, who, though most untrustworthy, has all the art of conciliating trust. Suppose him to be fluent, fair-spoken, prepossessing in manners and appearance, and to be especially plausible in glossing over a financial difficulty. Advance one more step in the hypothesis, and suppose him to be a private friend of many of those who are embarked with him in the same speculation; allied to some of them by marriage, and, more or less, in habits of intimacy with all. If such a person is at the head of affairs, and entrusted with the administration of the funds contributed by all, it is evident that he might impose upon the contributors to almost any extent. His artful representations would quiet their little panics, when such arose; and he would have it in his power to keep them still, while embezzling their resources, until the great crash comes, which announces to many of them, as with a clap of thunder, that they are bankrupts. Now the peril of such trust in worldly matters supplies a very fair image of the peril of a still more foolish and groundless trust in spiritual things. Our hearts are

notoriously most untrustworthy informants in any case where we are ourselves interested. It is not only Scripture which assevers this. We confess it ourselves, and re-echo the verdict of Scripture, when we say of any slight matter, with which we happen to be mixed up, "I am an interested party, and therefore I had better not be a judge." But while our hearts are thus, by our own confession, untrustworthy, there is no one in whose assertions we habitually place more trust. We think we cannot be deceived respecting ourselves; we know at all events our own motives and intentions, if we know any thing. The unkind, the insincere, the ungenerous, the ungrateful, never, we think, had any affinity with our nature; for we have never, as I observed above, admitted these forms of evil, without first palliating and disguising them, and making them look respectable to our own consciences. Faults there may have been, no doubt, in our temper and our conduct;—feelings (and transactions, too) for which we feel that we are in account with God; but we leave our own heart to manage and superintend the account; and it soothes us with the assurance that we never had any very bad intention, and so the whole affair will turn out well in the end,—we need not fear the ultimate exposure. Self-love conspires with trust in our own hearts, to make dupes of us as regards our spiritual account. Proverbially, and in the verdict of all experience, love is blind; and if love be blind, self-love, being the strongest, the most subtle, the most clinging, the most ineradicable of all loves, is blinder still. Self-love will not see, as self-trust cannot see, any thing against us. With these strong partialities to self in our own heart ever operative within us, and never probably capable, even in the best men, of being

entirely detached from us, to what an extent may we be imposed upon, in that which most vitally and nearly concerns us, if we do not from time to time call in and examine the accounts! What frightful arrears may we be running up, unawares to ourselves, if we do not sharply check and suspiciously watch this heart, who administers for us the account between us and God! And how may this accumulated arrears of guilt burst upon our minds with an overwhelming force when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to the Gospel,—when the divine sentence unmasks our sin of those excuses, with which we have been palliating it, and brings it home to us with a “Thou art the man!”

The first step in real Self-examination is to be fully aware of the deceitfulness of the heart, and to pray against it, watch against it, and use every possible method of counteracting it. But what means *can* we use? We offer a few practical suggestions in answer to this question.

First; *as regards our acknowledged sins.* We must remember that their hatefulness, and aggravations, if they were publicly confessed, might very probably be recognized by every one but ourselves, the perpetrators. There are certain loathsome diseases, which are offensive and repulsive in the highest degree to every one but the patient. And there is a close analogy between the spiritual frame of man and his natural; if the moral disease be your own,—rooted in your character, clinging to your own heart, it never can affect you with the same disgust as if it were another man's. Every step therefore must be taken to stand as clear as may be of the sin, while we sit in judgment upon it. In the first place, in the case of exceptional and grievous sins,

might not another sometimes be called in to sit in judgment, and so a fairer sentence secured than we are competent to give ourselves? If there be the moral courage equal to a perfectly candid avowal,—such an avowal as keeps back no aggravating circumstance,—and if an adviser is to be had at once holy, discreet, and considerate,—why should it not be related to such an adviser, that his counsel, prayers, and sympathy may be sought? Surely the Scriptural rule has a foundation of wisdom; “Confess your sins one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed.” If however we are aware that such an exposure could not be made by us in our present state of moral attainment *with perfect integrity*,—that we should be casting about in it to regain by palliating touches the forfeited esteem of him, on whom we threw ourselves thus confidentially;—or, in other words, that we are not men enough to make ourselves as vile in the eyes of our fellow-creatures as we are in God’s eyes,—then, until such moral courage is attained by us, (and surely we may lawfully pray for its attainment,) we must attempt to secure the same end—a fair judgment upon our sin—in another way. To stop short of the whole mischief in confession to a fellow-creature, would only be to deceive him as well as ourselves, and to entangle our consciences more effectually in the snares of hypocrisy. We must take another method, and this method will apply to the more usual and common as well as to the grosser sins, of forming an impartial estimate of the evil which is in us. Let us only *suppose*, by an effort of the imagination, that we confessed it frankly to such and such a person, known for wisdom and goodness,—how would he regard us? what is the measure of our sin in his esteem? because doubtless that should be

the measure of it in ours also. Would there not be a shrinking from revealing to such an one, not merely sins of a gross or glaring character, but such as the world calls trifles,—omissions of private prayer, little acts of dishonesty in trade or in respect of an employer's property, falsehoods which have slipped from us in the ordinary intercourse of life, impure or sensual thoughts, allusions in conversation which might lead the mind of others in a wrong direction, conceit of accomplishments and abilities, not merely suggested (for no man is accountable for the suggestions which the Devil makes to him), but secretly fondled and nourished in the chamber of the heart? If we shrink from making such disclosures to a wise and good man, *why* do we shrink? Because we feel that they would lower us in his esteem, and we have such a regard of man's esteem that we cannot bear to be placed lower in it. If a person to whom we had long given credit for a blameless and pious life should come to us, and confess the very sins to which we ourselves have recently given way, should assure us with evident sincerity that, however good the character he maintained, yet he had lived for such and such days without prayer, had practised or blinked at little dishonesties, or had seriously distorted truth on such and such occasions, we might (and, no doubt, should) sympathize with the distress of mind which the confession evinced, but we could hardly help saying within ourselves, "I should never have expected this from him. I should have thought that he would be truer to principle, when the stress of trial came." Then, if this be the estimate which we should form of another, who had committed our sins, should it not be the estimate which we should form of ourselves? and is not the comparatively lenient view which we take of



our own case due to that self-partiality which leavens and vitiates our whole nature? This light in which we see the sin, as it exists in our neighbour, is the true light in which we shall see it at the last day; and to see it now in that light, while at the same time we believe that the Blood of Christ has entirely cancelled it, is the great end of Self-examination, and the true fulfilment of the precept: "Judge therefore yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord."

But the probe of Self-examination needs to be applied to the better, as well as to the worse parts of our conduct. The natural heart is an adept in flatteries, not only suggesting excuses for the evil, but also heightening the colours of the good which, by God's grace, is in us. Where conduct stands the test of Self-examination, the motives of it should be called in question. We must do in regard of ourselves what we may never do in regard of others,—suspect that an unsound motive may underlie a fair conduct. It is something to be possessed with the knowledge that our actions take their whole moral colouring from the motives which prompt them. And to apply this knowledge practically to our own good actions, and thus to discriminate what is hollow and spurious in them from what is genuine, is the second branch of the great duty of Self-examination. By way of giving some serviceable hints for this investigation of our motives, it may be briefly remarked that of the religious conduct of religious persons a good part is usually due to custom. By almost all of us, to a certain extent, the Ordinances of religion are attended mechanically, without repulsion on the one hand, but at the same time without any effort or definite aim on the other. Again; certain proprieties and regularities of behaviour,

whether devotional or moral, are secured by deference to the prevailing opinions and habits of society, as is shown sometimes by the fact that, when we are in foreign parts, and no longer under this restraint, those proprieties and regularities are not so carefully maintained. Again ; many good actions are done, more or less, because they are in keeping with a man's position, conciliate credit to him, gain him the praise of others. Again ; works of usefulness and social (and even religious) improvement may be undertaken, more or less, from that activity of mind which is inherent in some characters, because naturally we cannot bear to be standing still, and are constitutionally unfitted for a studious, contemplative life. In a real work of benevolence a man cannot but find a very pure pleasure, and it is quite possible that this pleasure, and not any thought of Christ's service or God's glory, may be the main motive which actuates him in doing it. And perhaps some one will ask whether such pleasure is not, at all events, an innocent motive of action ? To which the answer is, " Perfectly innocent ; while at the same time it does not go the length of being gracious or supernatural." Nature can produce such a motive ; it is no necessary mark or token of the grace of God. Gracious or supernatural motives must at the least have respect to God and Christ, and the world to come, and the welfare of the soul. The highest of them, defined according to its principle, is the love of Christ, and, according to its end, the glory of God. But it is probable, alas ! that very few actions, even of the best men, are prompted exclusively by this motive, unalloyed with any sentiment of a baser kind. Nay, generally speaking, few indeed are the actions which are done from unmixed motives, whether purely good or purely

bad ; and our wisdom is not to be discouraged if we find, upon close Self-examination, as we shall assuredly find, that much which looks well before men is hollow and defective when tried by the touchstone of God's Word. Suffice it, if with trembling confidence we are able to make out, that we are under the lead of Grace, and following that lead. Motives more defecated from the dregs of nature, more purely and exclusively gracious, will come, if we press towards the mark, with a greater measure of spiritual attainment. If our conscience should affirm *upon the whole* the presence in us of earnest secret prayer, that is a great point for humble thankfulness ; because it is hard to see how secret prayer can be prompted by any but a religious motive, or how it can fail to be due to the supernatural Grace of God.

But we must hasten to bring these thoughts to a close. And let the close of a Chapter, whose great scope has been to render the reader dissatisfied with himself, be devoted to assure him that this dissatisfaction will avail him nothing, except as it leads him to a perfect, joyful, and loving satisfaction with his Saviour. To have probed their own wounds, and pored over their own inflamed and envenomed frames, would have availed the poisoned Israelites nothing, unless, after such a survey of their misery, they had lifted their eyes to the brazen serpent. "Look unto Him," therefore, "and be ye healed." Judged by the criterion of the highest motive, nothing can be more miserably defective than the best righteousness of the best man. It flows indeed from the Holy Spirit within him ; but even the influences of the Spirit derive an admixture of infirmity from flowing through the tainted channels of the human will and affections. It

was not so with the Lord Jesus. The nature which He took of the pure Virgin was subject to all the physical, but none of the moral, infirmities of our nature. His heart beat always true to God's glory and man's salvation;—a magnetic needle ever pointing to that great pole, not shaken even for a moment from its steadfastness by the vacillation of lower and less perfect motives. And His singleness of aim, His piety and benevolence of conduct is ours,—God be praised,—not only to copy, but also to appropriate. Take it, Christian; it is thine. Delight in it, as God delights in it, and thou shalt be agreed with God, and shalt stand before Him at the last day in the white robe, pure as driven snow; not having thine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

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## CHAPTER V.

### OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

**“They made the breastplate: . . . and they set in it four rows of stones: . . . And the stones were according to the names of the children of Israel, twelve according to their names, like the engravings of a signet, every one with his name, according to the twelve tribes.”—Exod. xxxix. 9, 10. 14.**

THE Spouse in the Canticles, who represents the Church, cries to the heavenly Bridegroom, “Set me as a seal upon thine heart.” Christ answers this prayer by interceding for each of His people in Heaven, by bearing upon His heart the wants, trials, troubles, sins of each, and by pleading for each the merits of His

most precious Death and Passion. In the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel, which contains the great high-priestly prayer of Our Lord, we find Him commencing this office of Intercession. "I pray for them," says He of His disciples. The Intercession then commenced; but it has been continuing ever since; it is prolonged through all time; it embraces not the Apostles only, but every soul of the redeemed. Of this Intercession the breastplate of the Jewish high priest supplies a beautiful figure. In the breastplate there were twelve precious stones, arranged in four rows of three, upon each of which was written the name of one of the twelve tribes. The breastplate, of course, when worn, would rest upon the priest's heart,—would rise and sink with every palpitation of the breast. When he appeared before God in his full sacerdotal attire, there would be the twelve names upon his heart, indicative of his love and care for the whole people of Israel. Names! the names of those with whom we are well acquainted, how much they imply! how true to nature is that Scripture idiom, or phraseology, which makes the name stand for the whole character! Let but the name of a person familiar to us be mentioned in our hearing, and what an instantaneous rush takes place into the mind of the personality of the man,—of his temperament, manners, features, way of thinking and acting, in short of all his physical and mental peculiarities! The names upon the high priest's breastplate betoken the individuality of Christ's Intercession for His people. Not a sparrow is forgotten before God. And not a single want or woe of a single soul is forgotten by the God-man, when He intercedes.

It was observed, in a recent Chapter, that every Christian is in a certain important sense a priest, con-

secrated in Baptism and Confirmation to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God. Accordingly every Christian must intercede, because Intercession is one of the priestly functions. The Intercession of the great High Priest for the whole Church is ever rising, like a cloud of fragrant incense, to the Throne of Grace. And it should be our ambition to throw, each one for himself, our little grain of incense into His censer. The prayer, which is offered by the Head in Heaven for the whole Body, should be re-echoed by the members here on earth.

The consideration of Intercessory Prayer properly follows that of Self-examination. They are at the opposite poles of the Christian's devotional exercises. Self-examination is the most interior, as Intercession is the most exterior, of those exercises. The one is a retiring into oneself and shutting out the whole world; the other is a going forth in sympathy and love towards other men,—an association of oneself with their wants, wishes, and trials. Hence these exercises are very necessary to keep one another in check. The healthy action of the mind requires that both shall continually be practised. By undue and overstrained self-inspection the mind is apt to become morbid and depressed, and to breed scruples, which tease and harass without producing any real fruit. The man becomes a valetudinarian in religion, full of himself, his symptoms, his ailments, the delicacy of his moral health; and valetudinarians are always a plague, not only to themselves, but to every body connected with them. One tonic adapted to remedy this desponding, timid, nervous state of mind, is an active sympathy, such as comes out in Intercessory Prayer, with the wants and trials of others, a sympathy based upon that precept of the holy

Apostle's, "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."

Observe, first, the great importance attached to this duty in Holy Scripture, and in that which is a faithful uninspired echo of Holy Scripture, the Prayer Book. In the Old Testament you find Abraham winning by Intercession the preservation of the cities of the plain, on condition—a condition, alas! not fulfilled—that ten righteous were found therein. In the New Testament you find the early Church winning by Intercessory Prayer the preservation of the life of St. Peter from the sword of Herod, on which life was suspended, humanly speaking, the existence of the infant community. But let us come at once to the Lord's Prayer, as containing by implication the most striking of all precepts on the subject. If the Lord's Prayer is to be the great model of Prayer, as it surely is, how much Intercession ought not our Prayers to contain! This extraordinary Prayer is so constructed, that it is impossible to use it, without praying for all other Christians as well as ourselves. Intercession, instead of being a clause added on to it, is woven into its very texture. Break off the minutest fragment you please, and you will find intercession in it. Oil and water will not coalesce; pour them together, and the one will remain on the surface of the other. But wine and water interpenetrate one another; in every drop of the mixed liquid there are both elements. When *we* pray for others, we usually add some paragraphs at the close of our ordinary prayers, distinct from them, as oil, though placed upon water, remains distinct. But in the Lord's own model Prayer, the Intercession and the petitions for self interpenetrate one another; the petitioner, who uses it *verbatim et literatim*, never employs the singular number.

A wonderful contrivance indeed, by which the Author secures a more important end than we perhaps are apt to think of. The Prayer, it must be remembered, was given as a kind of watchword for Christians, by the adoption and use of which they should be distinguished from the disciples of other Rabbis, such as John the Baptist,—“as a sign of profession, and mark of difference,” to accommodate the language of our Articles to the purpose, “whereby Christian men might be discerned from others that be not christened.” Now this sign or watchword must necessarily have Love woven into its very texture; for what was the appointed note, whereby the world was to know disciples of Jesus from those who were not His disciples? His own words answer that question very pointedly: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, *if ye have love one to another.*” Then in the very watchword of the Disciples there must be Love. And this could not be more strikingly contrived than by drawing up the watchword in such terms that no man could use it as a prayer for himself, without at the same time interceding for his brother Christians.

Of the testimony of our Liturgy to the duty of Intercessory Prayer we need only say that, after the penitential introduction of Morning and Evening Prayer, there are, as a general rule, only three collects which supplicate blessings for the congregation then worshipping;—all that follows is Intercession. The latter and longer half of the Litany is intercessory; and the Communion Service, after the Introduction, begins with Intercession for the Sovereign, and quickly passes on to the “Prayer for the whole state of Christ’s Church militant here on earth.” It appears that the compilers kept carefully in view the inspired precept



given for the guidance of public Prayers, "I exhort that first of all," (it may mean first in point of order, or first in point of importance, or both, but, any how, "first of all,") "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

Thus plain, then, is the duty of Intercessory Prayer. And the grounds of it are equally plain. The duty is based upon the fact that men are one body, and members one of another. Whether in Nature or in Grace, a man is essentially the member of a family. In his moral nature he has certain affections, such as benevolence and compassion, which have reference to others, and show clearly that, in the design of the Creator, he is no isolated creature. And in his spiritual nature too,—in his constitution by Grace and in Christ,—there are brotherly kindness and charity, which show that in the new creature also man is one Body. And if this be so, the weal and the woe of other men, of other Christians, must be, to a certain extent, our weal and woe,—cannot fail ultimately to reach us. The different parts of the living frame of man have a wonderful sympathy with one another: "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it." And so, if a blow is struck at the body politic either of the State or of the Church, in some extremity of that body which is very remote from ourselves, the blow cannot fail to vibrate through the whole frame, until it reaches even us in our distant corner. Few prayers of the Liturgy are regarded with such general indifference,—few, I fear, would be more readily dispensed with by the worshippers,—than those for the Sovereign, the mem-

bers of the Royal Family, and the Hierarchy ; but let any reasonable person ask himself, if he desire to see the necessity of such prayers, whether he really thinks that a general abandonment of these exalted functionaries by the Providence and Grace of God would prove in the end indifferent to himself. Suppose the court and the clergy, the whole body of our rulers in Church and State, to be utterly godless, (and godless they must be without the Grace of God,) could such a state of things be of little moment to me, because I happen to be at the lower extremity of the social scale? Would not the ungodliness in high places reach me, though in a low place, through a thousand avenues? If in no other way, would not God send judgments upon the nation and the Church, for the ungodliness of their rulers? If then each of us has a real interest in the moral and spiritual welfare of the community, it must be expedient for ourselves that we should pray for the whole community, and specially for those who before God are its Representatives. But, expediency altogether apart, if a man's relations to others are, as we have shown, bound up in his own nature, he must surely bring his relations and sympathies with him, when he appears before God. Otherwise, what does he do but virtually say to God, "Thou didst create me a member of a family, to love and to care for my brethren ; but here I stand before Thee in all the isolation of my own selfishness?"

And yet, though both the duty of Intercessory Prayer and the grounds of it are thus clear, there is perhaps no part of devotion which good Christians more systematically neglect. May it not be said that commonly even devout persons feel very little interest in any Intercessions, except such as touch their own im-

mediate circle of family and friends? While perhaps there are some, who of set purpose hug a sort of spiritual selfishness, and would not hesitate to avow that for them the personal question of their own salvation is indeed the whole of religion.

Now can we analyse this feeling of disinclination to a religious exercise, at once so reasonable and so scriptural? It seems to be a mixed feeling, having in it a good and a bad element. Some, no doubt, shrink from Intercessory Prayer, under a feeling that, as coming from them, it would be presumptuous. "What am I, that I should plead the cause of others,—I, who have so much to ask for myself, and who have no native right to ask at all? Or how can I think that prayers from me, like those from righteous Abraham, can win any thing from God for my brethren?" The feeling is good, but mistaken in its application. In the first place, what God expressly commands us to do, it can never be a presumption to do. If by His holy Apostle He has taught us to make prayers and supplications, and to give thanks for all men, His command surely is enough to exempt such prayers from the charge of presumptuousness. Had He *not* commanded them, such a scruple might reasonably find place. Prayers for the dead are not commanded,—nay, they are implicitly discouraged by the suggestions made in Holy Scripture that the state of the dead admits of no change; and therefore to offer such prayers *is* presumption, because they are beyond the warrant of God's express will and Word. But prayers for the living are, as we have seen, made obligatory upon the disciples of Jesus Christ, by the very form of the model Prayer which He gave us to use.

Next, as regards the imagined feebleness and impo-

tency of our prayers for others,—a feeling which looks humble and plausible enough on the surface,—we must inquire how far it may possibly resolve itself into a half-sceptical question as to the efficacy of Prayer altogether. And if there be in our minds no doubt on this head, we should then remember that our intercessions do not stand alone, but that in offering them, we co-operate with the whole Church, and, above all, with Christ the Head of the Church. Do not omit to calculate the power of combination. Many very slight muscular efforts, put forth imperceptibly, will create, it is said, force enough to turn a heavy piece of furniture. The smallest contributions made by a vast number of people would soon fill a monarch's treasury. Let, then, thy feeble intercession be put forth to move the will of God to show mercy to others. Other intercessions shall meet it at the throne of grace, which shall convert it into a strong force. Yea, His shall certainly meet it, which is singly and by itself the strongest of all forces with God,—powerful at all times to bend His Will, and to impetrate from Him the highest blessings. Rhoda, the damsel who admitted St. Peter to the house of Mary the mother of Mark, was one of those who were gathered together praying for the Apostle's deliverance. Her prayer was one of those which won from God the preservation of this chief Apostle.

But in our reluctance to Intercessory Prayer we must acknowledge, if we be candid with ourselves, the presence of a bad feeling, a great want of sympathy with others,—or, in other words, a lack of love. We feel no interest in them, and therefore do not care to pray for them. Now, so far as this is the case with us, we must consider, first, that such selfishness invalidates and empties of efficacy our prayers for ourselves. Our

Saviour in His comments on the cursing of the fig-tree, lays down, you will find, two great conditions of success in Prayer,—the first, that we shall pray in faith ; the second, that we shall pray in love. How does he pray in love, who in his prayer looks only on his own things, and not on those of others? Can he hope to win any thing from God, while he is in a mind so different from that of God? It is a great truth, reader, that if we desire to gain any thing from the Most High, our minds must be set more or less to the same key as His. If two harps be strung to the same key, but not otherwise, when one of them is struck, the other gives a responsive sound. There must be some secret affinity in nature between the lightning of heaven and the conductor which draws it down,—between the steel and the magnet which attracts it,—between the light substances and the chafed glass or sealing-wax, towards which they leap up and cling. And in Grace there must be a secret affinity between God and the soul (this affinity itself being the effect of Grace) before the soul can lay hold of God's Will, and draw out a blessing from Him, yea, draw God Himself into it.

This affinity stands in Love. God, the great Father, loves all men. He will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He sent His Son to save all,—Redemption being, as far as His will and intention are concerned, co-extensive with the human race. Therefore he who prays with the largest sympathy, he who embraces in his prayer the widest circle of his fellow-creatures, is most in sympathy with the mind of God, when he prays,—has the key of God's heart, and therefore the key of God's treasury. And as for him who prays in the total absence of this sympathy, does it not stand to reason that God must remain

mute to such a man? Suppose an entire absence from a petitioner's mind of the fraternal feeling towards fellow-men and fellow-Christians; and what does it seem to imply, but an absence of filial feeling? Is not the filial feeling the correlative of the fraternal, according to that word of the Apostle: "Every one that loveth Him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of Him?" Thus are the two first words of the Prayer of Prayers bound together in an indissoluble wedlock; and he who cannot in sympathy and love say "Our," cannot, in faith and trust, say "Father."

Then pray for others, if you have not yet done so, uniting with your prayers, where it is possible to do so and opportunity offers, that kindly interest in their concerns, which attests the sincerity of your intercessions. Pray particularly for those who have done you wrong: nothing tends more to engender that frame of mind, which is essential to success. Do not be baffled by the thought that explicitness of request is always necessary. The mention of the name, the thought of the person before the Throne of Grace, the simple commendation of him by Prayer to God's mercy and blessing, is a great point gained, and in numerous cases is all that can be done. If we much desire explicitness, and yet not know exactly into what form to throw the petition, the Holy Spirit, the Gift of gifts, which involves holiness and happiness both here and hereafter, may always be petitioned for on behalf of all. But, after all, there is much in that beautiful word of our Prayer for all Conditions of Men, "that it may please Thee to comfort and relieve them *according to their several necessities.*" God understands those necessities perfectly; and we may safely ask Him to supply them all, according to the understanding which

He has of them in His Infinite Mind. You may do for your friend, or your relative, the same kind office which those interested in the poor paralytic in the Gospel did for him,—bring him in the arms of Prayer, and lay him down in his helplessness before Jesus, thus silently commending him to the pity and sympathy of the Infinite Love. You may have many thus to commend, parents, brothers, sisters, colleagues, helpmates, friends, children and godchildren, masters, servants, pastors, parishioners, and may commend them all by the simple, quiet, devout recitation of their names. Yes, thou mystical Aaron, washed for thy sacred functions in the laver of regeneration, and clothed in the Righteousness of Christ, forget not to wear thy breastplate, when thou goest in to offer up a spiritual sacrifice,—neglect not to exhibit silently before God, graven upon thy heart, the names of all thou lovest; yea, be an intercessor, as far as in thee lies, for all the people; for of what member of the human family can it be said that he has no claim whatever upon thy sympathy and kind offices?

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## CHAPTER VI

### OF DEVOTIONAL READING.

“And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year.  
 “And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet.”—2 KINGS xiii. 20, 21.

WE Protestants do not attach virtue to relics, in the ordinary sense of that term; but there is a sense, in

which we may reasonably enough do so. Relics are remains ; and while we believe that no virtue resides in the *material* remains of a good man, we do not therefore exempt from efficacy his mental or spiritual remains. If he has left behind him in writing the effusions of a devout mind, we believe that these writings, by which "he being dead yet speaketh," often exercise an influence for good upon readers, long after he himself has passed away, and that thus the miracle wrought by the bones of Elisha is continually repeating itself in the experience of the Church. Souls are being quickened and edified by the instrumentality of books, which books are all that remain of their authors. A holy man, who lives in habitual communion with God, has a living influence on his generation, and also, if he be a writer, an influence on posterity. His living influence may be compared to the miracles wrought by the shadow of St. Peter, or by the handkerchiefs and aprons brought to the sick from the body of St. Paul. The influence exercised by his writings after death, may be fitly compared to the posthumous miracle recorded in the text, a miracle which stands alone in Holy Scripture, and in which it is clearly desirable to find some moral significance.

We shall speak first of the power of devotional reading, and then give some practical suggestions for the conduct of this exercise.

I. (1) The power of devotional reading may be seen from considering the effect, which constant association with the wise and good would naturally exert upon the mind. It is an axiomatic truth which has passed into an inspired proverb : "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Mere common intercourse with wise men, however,—the merely being thrown with them in



ordinary society,—might not, for various reasons, be productive of much good. The time might pass in remarks upon those trite and superficial topics, which are the necessary introduction to something deeper and better. We might not be able to get at the wise man's mind. He might be reserved in communicating his sentiments, or we might be awkward, and wanting in the tact to draw them out. Comparatively few persons have the gift, for a gift it is, of lively table-talk on subjects of secular interest. How much fewer possess such a gift on religious and spiritual topics! There are nine chances to one against your coming into contact with the mind of a devout person by merely being thrown with him in company. To see him in society is a different thing from seeing him in his closet, pursuing his meditations, and mixing Prayer with them. The nearest approach you can make to seeing him thus, and it is a very near approach indeed, is by reading his works of piety. In them is mirrored his best mind at his best moments. Words committed to the press are maturely considered and pruned of all excrescences, whereas in conversation there is necessarily much that is extemporaneous, and still more that is redundant. Suppose now that we were made privy to much of the interior life of men eminent for piety,—that they communicated to us the counsel, which was the result of their experience in religion, gave us their fresh thoughts upon the Holy Scriptures, threw out suggestions to us to help us in leading a holy life, made in our hearing remarks which had a certain heavenly savour and gave a relish for spiritual things,—suppose that they were constantly by our sides with these counsels, thoughts, suggestions, and remarks,—could we fail of deriving benefit from

our association with them?—must not our minds, almost according to their natural constitution and independently of the operation of Divine Grace, insensibly take a tinge from theirs? Shall it not be that some glowing sentiment of theirs, thrown out like a hot ember from the fire of their zeal, shall light upon combustible material in our hearts, and kindle there the flame of Divine love? Often has the opposite effect been produced by tales and poems, which have had a malignant tendency to stimulate the worst passions. If bad books are a very powerful engine in the hands of the Devil, as there can be no doubt that they are, shall not good and holy books be an equally powerful agency in the Economy of Grace? No one who has really studied *personal* religion, who has cultivated the piety of the closet as distinct from that of the platform, will hesitate to acknowledge that they are so.

(2) But the power of good books may be seen from another very important consideration respecting them. Spiritual reading has to a certain extent—more entirely for some minds than for others, but to a certain extent for all minds—taken the place of preaching: this has come about in the order of God's Providence, which has ordained the diffusion of literature through the press, just as it has ordained many less important movements. Without at all denying that oral teaching has still certain great prerogatives over teaching by books, that in voice, and manner, and generally in the influences which go to make up public speaking, there is something electric and sympathetic, which no mere dead letter can ever supply,—and without denying also that the form of Christian teaching, which is closest to the primitive and Apostolic model, is more likely to have God's blessing upon it than a mere modern form,—it

would yet be preposterous in the highest degree to say that we are as dependent for religious instruction upon oral teaching, as the early Church was. We see nothing derogatory to the Christian Pulpit in acknowledging that God, in modern times, causes some, though not all, of its work to be done by religious literature. Such an acknowledgment, if rightly understood, does not degrade the pulpit, but exalts the literature. And here we come across a thought, which must reappear presently in the shape of practical advice. The reading of spiritual books may be regarded, and ought to be regarded, more or less, in the light of a Divine Ordinance. That *Preaching* is an ordinance would be generally admitted by Protestants, and indeed must be admitted by all who take the New Testament as their guide. The only error which is sometimes allowed to cloud a little the clearness of the truth so admitted, is the narrowing the meaning of the word *Preaching* to a formal discourse delivered by a minister in the course of Divine worship. Instead of imposing upon the word this somewhat technical and cramped sense, take *Preaching* as being the communication of Divine knowledge to men through the instrumentality of men; and then *Preaching* is in the fullest sense an Ordinance, yea, one of the chiefest Ordinances of the Gospel. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." It is an Ordinance for the illustration, exposition, and application of Holy Scripture to the conscience. Instruction of this kind is essential to vital religion; it is the oil of the spiritual lamp, which keeps Prayer burning. Only admit that the power of *Preaching* may come to some—nay, to all, more or less,—through a written, as well as through a spoken word. Only admit that there may be a hearing in the closet

with the inward, as in the Church with the outward ear. But then this admission involves the duty, which we are all so slow to fulfil, of reading, no less than hearing, with all the solemnity of a devotional exercise. If it is wrong to be otherwise than seriously attentive to Preaching in Church, where the preacher is a living man, it is equally wrong to be otherwise than seriously attentive to Preaching in the closet, where the preacher is perhaps a dead one. And we doubt not that if good Christians were persuaded that some of the power and dignity of Preaching now rests upon the reading of good books, and if accordingly they read them with the same seriousness of spirit, and desire of edification, with which they listen, or try to listen, to formal Sermons, such books would be largely blessed to quicken in them the spiritual life, and to advance the Kingdom of God in their hearts.

II. But what suggestions may be given as to the conduct of this exercise? First, a discrimination must be used in the choice of books. All good books are not equally attractive, and therefore not equally profitable, to all minds. It is with spiritual very much as it is with bodily food. A man by a little experience, by a few trials, and by a short insight into his own constitution, soon gets to know that this or that is bad for him, that this or that, on the other hand, is for him digestible and wholesome. I say, *for him*. Probably it would be a mistake in medicine to assert that, independently of the constitution, circumstances, and temperament of the patient, any particular food was digestible or the reverse. And certainly it is a grand mistake in Theology to suppose that all the productions of devout writers are equally serviceable to every class of minds. It is notoriously the reverse. In His Holy Scriptures, which are the

great fontal abyss from which every work of piety and devotion must be drawn, the Lord has given us an infinite variety of Inspired Literature. What literature is there which does not find itself represented in the Holy Scripture,—poetry, history, biography, proverbs, letters, fables, allegories? There never was a book so little monotonous as the Bible, so continually changing its key,—if so be that some, at all events, may be charmed by the voice of the Heavenly Charmer. The same Spirit, who inspired the Holy Scriptures, gave great diversity of gifts to the early Christian teachers. All were not Apostles, nor all prophets, nor all teachers, nor did all speak with tongues, nor all interpret. And now that the supernatural gifts have died out of the Church, the same Spirit observes the same rule of variety in the different mental endowments, which He distributes to different teachers of Divine Truth. All men's writings have not the same power over all men's minds. Is there not a plain testimony to this in the avowal which we hear so often made; "I know I ought to like such and such a book, which all the world agrees in praising; but I cannot do it?" What the complaint really means is, that the book does not suit you, that the general strain of the author's mind has not that harmony with the general strain of yours, which will give him an influence over you for good. That being the case, leave him alone,—without however doubting or denying the power which he may have over other minds. Even in the Holy Scriptures themselves we think ourselves quite warranted in selecting those passages which are most suitable to the circumstances, intelligence, and character of the reader. No one would think of recommending a peasant to engage himself much with the Book of the Revelation, or a *child* to study the eighth chapter to the Romans.

Much more, then, may we exercise a similar discretion with those works, which, however pious and edifying, do not come to us on the authority of Inspiration. Choose, then, those books to which, from a cursory knowledge of their contents, you find yourself most drawn. There are several which have attained the rank of standard works, from their possessing excellences of various kinds. Such are the *Saint's Rest*, the *Pilgrim's Progress* (which all know a little of, but very few have studied), the *Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis, Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, Cecil's *Remains*, the *Thoughts of Adam*, Pascal's *Thoughts on Religion*, Bishop Hall's *Contemplations*, Edwards on the *Religious Affections*, Leighton's *Commentary on St. Peter*, Foster's *Sermons*, the *Christian Year*, and several others which will at once suggest themselves to all who are commonly acquainted with our religious literature. I may here add that the Roman Church having made devotion much more of a systematic study than Protestants have done, many of their books, if used with discretion, may be found extremely useful. On no account, however, should they be resorted to by those whose minds are not fully made up on the unscriptural or rather anti-scriptural tenets of Romanists, in those points on which Protestants are at issue with them. Such books are the great lure which have enticed into that corrupt Communion a number of excellent persons, whose devotion has outstripped their judgment, and who have consented to hold their reason in abeyance, while they have given the full swing to their imagination and affections. As you value Scriptural truth, and the fairness and impartiality of your own mind, let there be no meddling with such books, unless the mind has

come to regard it as a closed question that Romanism, in many of its principal features, is expressly contrary to the Word of God. We shall be poorly compensated for a warmer and more genial form of religion, if we have been enticed into positive doctrinal error. To throw ourselves in the way of seduction by such error, is to run presumptuously into temptation; and God preserves no one from temptation, who runs into it presumptuously.

But suppose our book chosen, and chosen well and wisely. In what manner shall we read it? The answer to this question has implicitly been given already. Read it as a devotional exercise, mixing Prayer, or at least devout aspirations, with the reading. Every thing that can be said on the subject is really wrapped up in this,—that the reading shall be devotional. Yet we will expand the thought a very little.

Think of the author as now a member of the Church triumphant, one who is with Christ in Paradise, and, for aught you know, looking down upon your struggles and trials from a sphere where sin and sorrow are unknown. Regard this book as a sort of letter sent from him to you, to encourage you on your heavenward pilgrimage, and to stir in you a livelier hope of the inheritance to which he has (by Grace) attained. By degrees you shall feel attracted in a strange way, though you have never seen him, towards his mind, as it is mirrored in his writings, and shall realize something of the sentiments described in that beautiful passage of the Christian Year:—

“Meanwhile with every son and saint of Thine,  
Along the glorious line,  
Sitting by turns beneath Thy sacred feet,  
We'll hold communion sweet,

Know them by look and voice, and thank them all  
For helping us in thrall,  
For words of hope, and bright ensamples given,  
To show through moonless skies that there is light in  
Heaven."

The recollection that you read for edification, and not for curiosity, or to serve a controversial purpose, will suggest many wholesome rules. Carefully eschew all dissipation in the method of reading. Dissipation is the great snare of all study, whether secular or religious, in the present day. There is so much to read,—such profusion of matter in every department of literature, nay, even in the public journals,—that insensibly the habit is formed of skipping the dull, and sipping the interesting, and never honouring any book with a fair and thorough perusal. We must set ourselves in opposition to this habit, if we wish to profit by devotional reading. Books must be read through from end to end, if it were only as a corrective to that discursive habit of mind, which the literature of the day fosters, and which is so particularly inimical to devotion. Generally speaking, a second book of devotion should not be taken up, till the first is finished. If the time which we can spare for such reading is short, books of thoughts, more or less sententiously expressed (such as some of those I have mentioned, and to which I may here add "Selections from the Writings of Payson"), will be found very serviceable. The eye soon runs over a few lines, which convey a weighty sentiment; and, when the sentiment is caught, the mind may recur to it at spare moments during the rest of the day.

We have already said that good and holy sentiments are the oil which feeds the lamp of Prayer. They are emphatically so. And this suggests an occasional use



of good books, over and above their regular and normal use. There are seasons known to every devout person, when the vessel of the heart seems to run dry, and the flame of Prayer burns low in the socket. You may then often replenish the vessel by reading the favourite spiritual author. Pass your eye once more over that marked passage,—over those words which glow with such a fervour of devout sentiment; and the oil will flow again, drop by drop, into the vessel. Particularly may this be done with Christian poetry. Poetry is the voice of the affections; and, therefore, has a peculiar tendency to quicken the affections. The music of David's harp chased away from Saul the evil spirit of moody sullenness. Elisha's minstrel, playing with his hand, laid such a spell upon the prophet's mind, that the hand of the Lord came upon him, and he prophesied. And the minstrelsy of psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, has often brought the Christian out of a state of mind, in which Prayer seemed a labour and a drudgery, if not an impossibility, into that calm and holy frame, in which he could again put forth spiritual energies, and has found himself able to renew his interrupted converse with God. Give the specific a trial, and you shall ere long know its virtue for yourself.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### ON FREQUENTING THE HOLY COMMUNION.

“~~Whether~~ therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”—1 COR. x. 31.

It is curious to observe how religious ideas are continually in a state of flux and change. Not only do

outward fashions alter, but habits of thought are different from what they once were. Controversies have shifted their ground; and the theological combatants have gone off to a different part of the field. Time was when many a controversial lance was broken in our Church on the question at issue between Calvinists and Arminians. The keen interest once taken in that debate has entirely collapsed; and thinking men on both sides would probably admit that there is much precious truth in both Calvinism and Arminianism,—which is only another form of saying that Holy Scripture makes statements which favour both. To pass from doctrines to practices (not that the two can ever be severed except in idea, for practice must ever be based upon doctrine), there is now in progress a revolution in our habits of thought on the subject of frequently communicating. Serious Christians are coming round gradually, it is presumed by the force of conviction, to the habit of communicating much oftener than they used to do. More frequent opportunities of receiving the holy Supper are given by the Clergy; an index in itself of a changed state of thought and feeling on the subject; for where there is no demand, there is usually no supply. And, accordingly, the old manuals of preparation for the Holy Communion, excellent as several of them are, and containing, as many of them do, much valuable material for edification, are becoming, to a great extent, obsolete. They need to be thrown into a new form, adapted to a weekly or fortnightly recurrence of the Ordinance. For that the copious meditations and self-examinations, which most of them contain and recommend, should be gone through weekly, fortnightly,—nay, even monthly,—by persons engaged in the active business of life, is of

course out of the question,—a simple impossibility. A volume of preparatory devotions, (and several of these manuals *are* volumes,) implies that the Ordinance recurs but rarely, at great and solemn periods.

Is the old method of rare Communion, or the new method of frequent Communion, the best? We believe the new method to be so, because it is based upon a truer view of the Ordinance. The frequency or rarity of celebration would be in itself of comparatively little moment, if it were a mere outward fashion, if there were no principle involved in it. But a principle there is, underlying, and giving rise to, the change of practice; and we rejoice to think that this principle is more freely and generally recognized than it has hitherto been.

If the Eucharist were merely, as Zwingle most erroneously thought, a commemorative rite,—if the whole design of the Ordinance were to affect us with a picture of Our Saviour's Passion,—this design would doubtless be carried out more effectively by a rare than by a frequent Communion. For it is a law of the mind, from the operation of which we shall strive in vain to exempt ourselves, that the impression which is constantly repeated gradually loses its force. But the Lord's Supper is not merely a commemoration, but an actual channel or vehicle of Grace to the soul. It stands on the same footing in this respect with Prayer, reading of Scripture, public worship, and sermons; only we believe that it takes precedence of them all, as the instrument of a higher Grace, and a means of a closer communion with God. Observe that by the Word of God itself, the Eucharist is placed in the same category with the other means of Grace, and that it seems to be intimated that the early Christians were equally frequent in the

observance of all of them. "And they continued steadfast *in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship*" (they constantly attended the teaching of the Apostles, and did not forsake the assembling of themselves together with them in the name of CHRIST), "*and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.*" There is no hint here that the doctrine and the prayers were to be of frequent recurrence, but the breaking of Bread to be reserved, as I may say, for state occasions. If all are means of Grace, and if the "breaking of Bread," as being the distinctively Christian Ordinance,—yea, as communicating to the soul, not indeed by a carnal transubstantiation, but "after an heavenly and spiritual manner," the very Body and Blood of our crucified Redeemer,—is the highest means of Grace, why should not all recur with equal frequency? Do we allege that the liveliness of our feelings respecting the Lord's Supper will wear off with the frequent repetition of it? Nay; but it is not liveliness of feeling which in any Ordinance we should seek, but the strengthening of principle. The two objects are quite distinct. Feeling occasionally runs very high, when principle is at its lowest ebb. Church history supplies instances in abundance of spiritual ecstasies (mere Satanic delusions, of course), where there was no real submission of the will to God. And on the other hand, principle may be in its full strength, and faith may be really clinging to God with all the force of moral determination, while feeling seems to have ebbed away altogether out of the soul. Thus Our Lord cries out upon the cross that God has forsaken Him, while He is really tightening His hold upon the Father, and indicating this firmness of grasp by the little word expressive of so much clinging, "My,"—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

If superficial liveliness of feeling were what we ought to seek in the Ordinances of religion, there could be no question that too frequent repetition in any of them would be a mistake, calculated to counteract their influence. If for the next two years we shut up our Bibles, and thus divested our minds in some measure of their glib familiarity with the phraseology of Scripture, and at the end of that period opened them at one of the more pathetic or sublime passages, that passage would stir in our minds a far more vivid emotion, than Scripture ever communicates under our present circumstances. At the first outbreak of the Reformation, when the Sacred Volume was scarce, and the people sunk in gross ignorance of its truths, men had a much keener appreciation of it, a much livelier feeling of its preciousness than now, when it lies on the shelf of every cottage, and its comparatively fresh-looking binding shows the neglect in which spiritual blessings are held, as soon as they have become cheap, and easy of access. But in order that we might again have those vivid impressions respecting God's truth which men had in those old days, when they gathered round the chained Bible in the parish church, and appointed one of their party to read it aloud to them, it would be a strange method of proceeding, and one based on a false logic, to unlearn as much of this blessed Book as we possibly could, in the hope of thus coming fresh to the perusal of it. Then why is not the same reasoning, which holds good in the case of the Holy Scriptures, to be applicable to other means of Grace? If all we sought in the Eucharist were a certain natural sensibility to the Death of Christ, which Death the Ordinance is appointed to show forth, then indeed might we go once a year only, like the Scottish

peasants, over hill and dale, to partake of the Heavenly Banquet;—then indeed might we enjoy the artlessness with which the rite is there celebrated, as being a nearer approach to the original institution *in the way of picture*. But I seek much more in the Eucharist than to look at a picture and be touched by it. I seek to be fed in that holy Ordinance; to be spiritually nourished, through the elements of Bread and Wine, with that Flesh which is meat indeed, and that Blood which is drink indeed. And if the things of the body furnish any sufficient analogy to the things of the soul, I should fear that the receiving this Heavenly Food only once a year would be something very much resembling spiritual starvation.

Yet, argue as we may, our arguments will go for nothing against instinct. And in devout minds which have been reared under the old system of things, there is an instinct adverse to very frequent Communions, which it is difficult, if not impossible, to supplant. We believe that in this instinct there is an element of reason and reverence, however false may be the conclusions to which it leads; and that at all events our forefathers had hold of a truth, for which it behoves us to find some place in the modern system. Let us endeavour to analyse the feeling of reluctance which many good persons still entertain to a frequent (say a weekly) Communion.

Unquestionably, reverence towards the Ordinance has some share in engendering the reluctance. It is felt, and very justly felt, that in order to make so frequent a Communion of real value to us, there must be a general correspondence between the Ordinance and our lives. There is something dreadful in the thought of so high an Ordinance degenerating into formality;

and degenerate into formality it must, unless, contemporaneously with this frequent celebration, there should be a general raising of the tone of the recipient's character and conduct. This is all true, just, and sound,—right in feeling; right in principle. But why should we implicitly reject the other branch of the alternative? Why is there *not* to be a general raising of the tone of our character and conduct? Why should we resolve to acquiesce in respectability, and virtually decline to aim at sanctity? Ah, sluggish will, thou art in fault! Frequent Communion demand higher aspirations; and higher aspirations involve stronger efforts and harder struggles. And these efforts and struggles are a tax upon the will, which the will perhaps is not quite ready to pay. Is this the secret cause of our reluctance? I believe it is frequently one cause. For if a man be honestly bent, not merely on reaching a very fair average standard of excellence, but on “perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord,” the reluctance very soon vanishes. Frequent Communion is then willingly embraced as a help, not declined out of a false homage to the Ordinance.

But what, it may be asked, constitutes conformity of life to the Ordinance of the Holy Communion? What is that habitual state, the living in which (more or less) establishes that correspondence between us and the Ordinance, which makes a very frequent reception available? Let the text which stands at the head of this Chapter furnish us with an answer to this question.

It is a great mystery, which teaches us many valuable lessons, that God has consecrated our reception of food into the highest Ordinance of religion. What may this circumstance be designed to teach us? The

lesson expressly stated in the text, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The reception of food is a *common* action,—homely, trivial, having nothing dignified or sublime about it, as is intimated by the words, "whatsoever ye do," following upon the specification of it,— "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." And again, the reception of food is a *necessary* action,—it is what we *must* do, in order to maintain our lives. The implication of the text, then, is that in our common and trivial actions, even in those which are bound upon us by necessity, and which we cannot any how escape from doing,—there is room and scope for glorifying Almighty God. On the one hand, we may do them mechanically and in a spirit of routine, or from the low motive of the pleasure which is to be had from them, or from the wrong motive of human praise. Or, on the other hand, we may do them, or strive to do them, in a religious spirit, fixing the eye of the mind, while we do them, on the great end of God's Service and Kingdom. In one word, we may either go through common life in a common way, tying up our religion to Public Worship on Sundays, and private prayer on week-days, or we may go through common life with an uncommon motive,—the thought of God, and the desire of pleasing and serving Him in all things. Now if a man should be going through common life thus,—if he sanctifies and elevates it, or even strives, as much as he can, to sanctify and elevate it, by importing into it a Christian motive, there is between him and the Holy Communion a certain correspondence, which is easily perceived. What were the materials out of which Christ framed the highest rite of His holy Religion? Did He prescribe a costly sacrifice, such as it would be a tax upon



human resources to furnish? No such thing. He blessed a common meal, and consecrated it into a Sacrament, and made it the means, by a marvellous mystery of Grace, of communicating Himself to man's soul. What did He mean by so doing? Many things of grave import, some things, possibly, beyond our reach; but this most assuredly,—that the genius of His Religion, as expressed in its highest Ordinance, is to sanctify all the actions of human life, even down to the humblest and most necessary. To do this is, if I may so say, to breathe the atmosphere of the Holy Communion, and to have such a congeniality with it, as shall never make it match ill or show unsuitably upon the general groundwork of our lives. Reader, are you and I striving thus to sanctify,—not only holy seasons and holy exercises,—but all the common actions of daily life? Then shall we feel attracted towards a frequent reception of the Holy Communion, as one great means of furthering our object.

But in the feeling of reluctance to frequent Communion, there is one decidedly good element, which we must not pass over without notice. Persons think it beneficial to have certain solemn and stated periods, at which they may look into the affairs of their souls more narrowly, wind up their spiritual accounts more at leisure, and make a fresh start, as it were, upon their Christian course. These periods have been with them hitherto their Communions; each of which has thus become a sort of era in their inner life. But, if they are now to communicate every week or every fortnight, this solemn scrutiny and preparation, if it be not an actual impossibility, will become an unreality. Special devotional exercises are good at special seasons, but the mind cannot profitably be under such a strain every week or every fortnight. Sundays are great helps to a

holy life ; but only one day in every seven is appointed to be a Sunday.

In all this there is great force and reason. And he who is minded to live the Devout Life must on no account abandon the excellent practice of periodically examining his conscience on every department of duty, and seeking from God in prayer, and retirement from the world, that fresh spring of holy energy which is to be found for all of us in the Blood and Grace of Jesus Christ. But why must this necessarily be done before every Communion ? Why might it not be done only before the three great Communions of Christmas, Easter, and Whit-Sunday ? Or if even this be found impracticable, as with persons heavily engaged will very likely be the case, why should not these special devotions be limited to one Communion in the year, that of Christmas or that of Easter ? Assuredly, a thorough and sifting Self-examination, once satisfactorily performed, is better than three or four cursory inspections of the conscience ; Self-examination being a matter in which to be cursory and superficial is usually to deceive oneself. Then for ordinary Communions, assuming, of course,—and I am assuming all through,—that the conscience is kept clear of wilful sin,—our usual evening retrospect of the day, with some very trifling addition to our evening prayer on Friday and Saturday, the eighty-fourth Psalm, for example, and the prayer of access in the Communion Office, “ We do not presume to come to this Thy Table,” &c., would abundantly suffice.

Have we now reached and met in any mind the objections which are felt to a frequent Communion ? Or does there remain still a lurking mistrust of such a practice, under the suspicion perhaps, of which Eng-

lishmen are at all times so susceptible, that it is popish? Such a suspicion is, in the first place, not borne out by the facts. Romanists, as a general rule, although they constantly assist at the Mass, (that is, are present at the celebration, and follow what is being done mentally,) communicate much seldomer than English Churchmen. Their unscriptural tenet of Transubstantiation, giving as it does a false awfulness and a superstitious mysteriousness to the Ordinance, frightens them away and holds them back from frequent Communion. So much for the real state of the case among them. And as regards the *theory* of frequent Communion, by way of showing that it is by no means exclusively Romanist, let me close this Chapter with an extract from those touching and edifying addresses which have been lately published under the title of the *Adieux* of Adolphe Monod. The speaker was a French Protestant pastor, eminent for piety and for his extraordinary abilities as a preacher. The pulpit from which he spoke,—and it is sometimes the most effective of all pulpits,—was a death-bed, around which, Sunday by Sunday, (for he lingered long,) he gathered as many members of his little flock as the sick-room would hold, and received with them the Holy Communion, and spoke to them of such subjects as the “*Regrets of a Dying Man*.” One of these addresses is headed “*Frequent Communion*.” While guarding myself against being understood to recommend, as he does, a *daily* Communion, I willingly quote him as an advocate of frequent celebrations. Thus he speaks to the little flock at his bed-side, the words being taken down from his lips by his children:—“My dear friends, I wish you to know that in the frequent reception of the Communion during my illness I find much comfort,

and I hope also much fruit. It is a great evil that the Communion should be celebrated so rarely in our Church, an evil which people on all sides are now applying themselves to remedy. Our Reformers, in establishing this order of things, have taken care to explain that they did it only for a time, and to prevent certain very grave abuses, which had crept into the primitive Church. But what they did as a temporary precaution has remained for ages in the greater number of our churches. At length we reach the time when we may expect to have frequent Communion restored to us. Calvin says somewhere, that the Communion ought to be celebrated at least every Sunday. Remark this *at least*. If it should be every Sunday *at least*, what should it be *at most*? *At most* must be, to take it as the early Christians did, according to Calvin (and that comes out, too, clearly enough from the Acts of the Apostles), every day, from house to house, at the close of the family repast. Each of you may have remarked that rare Communion gives I know not what strange and extraordinary idea of the Communion,—of the preparation which ought to precede, and of the emotions which follow it. On the contrary, frequent Communion makes us understand much better the true character of this Sacrament; and it is impossible that daily Communion should fail to put us in perfect possession of that true character; for it teaches us to connect the Communion with all that there is most simple in Christian life, just as a repast is one of the simplest things in ordinary life. But whether there should be a daily celebration or not, certainly in seeing in the Communion the simplest expression of our faith, we shall profit by it most, we shall gather from it the greatest fruit, and it is thus that it will nourish our

souls most effectually with the Flesh and with the Blood of Jesus Christ."

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF THE CHURCH.

"If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."—MATT. xviii. 19.

It would be well if, in considering the various Ordinances of Religion, we began by narrowly examining their charter, as it exists in God's Holy Word. How shall we ascertain their true character? how shall we know what we may expect from them, and what we may not expect? how, in short, shall we secure ourselves against a false estimate of them, otherwise than by looking into their original constitution? The exact limits of a patent or prerogative, granted by the government of a country to any individual, can only be ascertained by consulting the terms of the patent. Let the holder abstract from the public records, and hide away the parchment on which those terms are written, and there are then no powers which he may not assume, on the general vague representation that the patent is his.

The passage which stands at the head of this Lecture contains the charter of Public Worship. The Church has given to Public Worship divers forms of its own devising; but here we have, if I may so say, the raw material, out of which all forms are manufactured. Now from the examination of this charter, we will

seek, first, to ascertain the true theory of Public Worship ; and then draw from that theory some practical hints for the conduct of this devotional exercise.

It is not with any controversial object, for controversy is seldom edifying, but by way of clearly defining the idea, that we say, at the outset, that in the practice both of the Church of Rome, and of the Protestant sects in this country, we trace a degeneracy from the Scriptural theory of Public Worship. Extremes continually meet ; and it is not a little remarkable that both by Romanists and Dissenters the functions of Public Worship are all devolved upon the clergy,—whether priest or officiating minister,—and the people take, I do not say no part, but no common part with him. The Mass is the chief office of the Roman Church ; at which even those who do not communicate assist, as it is called, every Sunday. In what does this assistance consist ? The question may be answered by examining the books of devotion recommended and used at the Mass. It will be found, on looking into such books, that the idea of the congregation's praying as one body,—using the minister as their mouthpiece, and signifying their assent to him by occasional responds,—is, if not eliminated, very much obscured. The priest is doing one act, supposed to be sacrificial, to the effectiveness of which the congregation can contribute nothing ; and, while he is doing it, the people are furnished with separate devotions appropriate to the several stages of it, which each person recites secretly. The priest and they are not asking the same thing at the same time ; and the only agreement which there is in their petitions stands in place and time,—in the fact that they are offered in the same church at the same hour. Nay it might

happen that several of the worshippers should use different books of devotions on the Mass, even as with us different members of the congregation bring with them different books of devotion on the Holy Communion; and that thus two persons, kneeling side by side, might be so far from agreeing in what they ask, as to be offering two different petitions at the same moment. If the principle were carried out to an extreme, no two members of the congregation would be praying for exactly the same thing; and Public Prayer would resolve itself into *a series of private prayers said secretly in public*. But the truth is, that Private Prayer and Public Prayer are wholly different things, separated from one another by a much deeper distinction than the mere accident that the one is offered in the chamber, the other in the face of the Church. Their scriptural charters proclaim that they are Ordinances differently constituted. The charter of Private Prayer runs thus: "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door,"—exclusion of the world from the thoughts, if not from the place, is an essential,—“pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” The charter of Public Prayer, on the other hand, runs thus: “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” Agreement in the petition (not necessarily, as I understand it, agreement in the place or time of offering the petition, though that is both natural and proper) is an essential of this sort of prayer, so that if you remove this agreement, the prayer ceases to be Public Prayer at all. It is not the resorting to the same House of Prayer, it is not the being side by

side with one's neighbour in bodily presence, but it is the mental and cordial agreement with him as to what we shall ask, which constitutes the prayer public. Develope this idea a little further, and you will arrive at the conclusion, which is as rational as it is scriptural, that Private Prayer touches and deals with the relations of the individual to God, those relations to which no other heart than his own is privy, his secret sins, trials, struggles, successes; whereas Public Prayer embraces his relations as a member of the Church, not only to the Head of the Church, but also to the other members. In the one, there can usually be no agreement, by reason of the diversity of characters and wants. In the other we approach God as a Society, incorporated by the royal charter of His Son, having an understanding with other members as to our wants and petitions, and framing them in language so general as to meet the necessities of all. To use an illustration, Private Prayer is the exhibition of a biography to God; Public Prayer, the exhibition of a history. A biography is a distinct thing from a history. The one presents the individual in the private sentiments which actuate him; the other in his public enterprises, as a member of the body politic. And on account of this difference of character, no collection of biographies of any period would form a history of the period, any more than the aggregate of private devotions said in public constitutes public devotion. At the same time it must be admitted that, just as biographies mention occasionally the public exploits of their subjects, and histories sometimes delineate the private characters of public men, so Public Prayer and Private Prayer will occasionally trench upon the strict provinces of one another,—as when in his closet a man intercedes for the whole



Church, or as when in the congregation some passage of the Liturgy comes home to our own present wants with a peculiar force and appropriateness. Suffice it that, generally speaking, the provinces of the two are distinct. We may not press *any* distinction too hard.

Turning now to the Protestant sects; does their practice realize better the true ideal of Public Worship than that of Romanists? We hold it to be at least a nearer approach to the true ideal; for the theory of all Protestant Worship certainly is, that there shall be agreement as to the things asked for, that minister and people shall join in the same petitions. But how can such agreement be effectually secured in the absence of a Liturgy, or form previously prepared, unless the pastor and congregation should meet before Divine Service, and come to some understanding as to the substance of their petitions; a course which, if not impracticable, has probably never been attempted? In extempore prayer it is out of the question that the people can know what the minister is about to pray for: when he has uttered his petition, they may, of course, give their mental and cordial assent to it, and doubtless devout Dissenters, of which there are numbers, endeavour to do so; but before this mental process, which consists of first taking in the petition with the mind, and then assimilating it with the will, is well finished, the minister has passed on to another petition, faster than the worshipper can follow, and the latter soon finds that there is no way of really joining, but by listening, as he would to a Sermon, and giving a general assent to the contents of the prayer by means of the Amen at the end. On the other hand, a Liturgy, if seriously and intelligently used, necessarily secures exact agreement among the worshippers as to

the things sued for ; nay, determines even the form in which each supplication shall present itself to the minds of all. There are, we believe, many other advantages accruing to a Liturgy like ours, which are beside the purpose of the present argument. We prize our Prayer Book for its intrinsic beauty, for its chaste fervour, for its primitive simplicity, for its close harmony with Scripture, for the way in which it fences us against false doctrine ; but the fundamental advantage of a Liturgy, merely as a Liturgy, is this, that it secures, far more than any extempore prayer can do, that agreement in the things asked for, which is part of the charter of Public Prayer, and so grounds the act of worship on Christ's own Word of Promise : " If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

We have canvassed freely the defective theories of Public Worship, maintained by those who are opposed to us on either side ; but it is in no spirit of boastfulness that we have done so, nor with any desire to conceal our own faults, which are both patent and abundant. The truer and more Scriptural our Church's *theory* of Public Worship is, the more cause have we for humiliation, that in *practice* we so grievously fall short of it. It is true that we have every security, which mere rule and system can give us, for agreement in the substance of our petitions ; but agreement is after all a matter of the mind and heart, and cannot be prescribed by rule or system. Without such cordial agreement, the most beautiful Liturgy in the world soon degenerates into a dreary and formal recitation, lacking both the reality of the Romanist's secret

devotion, and the vivacity and freshness of the Dissenter's extempore prayer. We might, if we duly prized and properly used our advantages, make our churches the very gate of Heaven to every devout soul; as it is, the felt formalism of the Service in many of them, (for formalism is a thing felt by instinct,) rather chills and throws back the energies of spiritual life. Where is the remedy to be sought? In the efforts of individuals to bring about a better state of things. In vain do we declaim against the Church of our day in the abstract. The Church is composed of individual members, upon each of whom rests his own portion of the blame and responsibility; it is I, and you, Reader, who are in fault. If we are minded for the future to do justice to the system of our Church, and bring out the beauty of its theory, let us resolve first, each one for himself, to do what in us lies to contribute to such a result. And let us consider whether the following hints, all founded on the charter of Public Prayer already quoted, may not be of service to us.

1. Let us seek *to understand* the Liturgy of the Church. If agreement in our petitions is to be secured by the use of it, it is evident that the worshippers must, each one for himself, bring some considerable portion of their minds to it, before they come to Church. The Morning and Evening Prayer, indeed, are more or less familiarized to our ears by constant repetition; but then familiarity with the sound is a totally different thing (as a child's knowledge of the Catechism proves) from intelligent appreciation of the sense—nay, is probably more or less of a hindrance to that intelligent appreciation. Words got by heart are foolishly supposed to be thoroughly mastered, whereas all that we have secured of them is the rhythm and the

run of the style, and the meaning, Proteus-like, has given us the slip. How many English Churchmen have ever made the various petitions of the Morning and Evening Prayer a subject of thought,—who yet know the Service quite well enough superficially, to catch up and fling abroad certain captious popular objections to parts of it? And in the Occasional Services, the Christening, the Wedding, or the Burial, though the first of these have all the dignity and all the efficacy of a sacrament, and the two last are of a nature to enlist peculiarly our personal feelings; where is the man who seriously asks himself, before he goes to Church, what are the blessings for which he is about to sue? Yet surely we must at least ask ourselves this question, if we would avail ourselves of the opportunity of agreement which our Liturgy affords, and so avail ourselves of our Lord's Promise to united Prayer. We must *think* about our Prayer Books, as well as about our Bibles, if we are to profit by them. The real action of a man's own mind upon the Liturgy would be worth a great deal of book learning. However, if explanation and comment be required; by those who wish to study the subject chiefly in its devotional aspect, Dean Comber supplies plentiful and wholesome matter; and for those who desire something less prolix and less expensive than the works of Comber, Shepherd on the Common Prayer may be found suitable. It would be one great point (and I mention it, because in all studies a definite and circumscribed aim is of great importance) to make the Psalms thoroughly available in Public Devotion,—to say them, or sing them, with more of understanding, as well as more of spirit, than heretofore. With persons who are only moderately acquainted with Divinity, some commentary will pro-

bably be found necessary for this purpose, and Bishop Horne's is perhaps the best that can be recommended. I may add that it is a great clue to the right devotional use of those Psalms, which manifestly refer to Christ, to remember, while saying or singing them, that we are one with Him ; and that we repeat them in Church as being identified with Him in God's sight—"members of His Body, of His Flesh, and of His Bones ;" not as if we were reading mere instructive lessons."

2. Do not allow Public Worship to degenerate into a mere saying of your private prayers in church. Set yourself against this selfish and narrowing tendency ; for it rather defeats the end of the Ordinance. Think of the many others who are around you at Public Worship, of their sins, trials, wants, wishes, mercies,—trying to throw yourself into their case. Be you praying and giving thanks for them, while they are praying and giving thanks for you ; this will constitute a sweet agreement, a beautiful symphony, in the ears of the Most High. Too many Christians, good and pious in the main, go to Church with this idea working in their minds : "I go to ask for what I myself want, and to give thanks for what I myself have received, and I do not busy myself with other people." Then you might nearly as well stay at home. The closet is the place for pouring out the heart before God, and laying down the secret burdens at the Throne of Grace. The Church is the place for the intercommunion of Saints with one another, and of all with God. Hence the great comprehensiveness of the terms in which our Confession and Thanksgiving are drawn up. They are expressly framed to cover all cases.

3. Let not the outward expression of agreement be

wanting ; or, in other words, be careful to make in an audible voice all the responses prescribed by the Church. This may seem a slight matter in itself ; but it really rests upon profounder principles than we are apt to imagine. In the first place, the audible respond is a valuable protest in favour of the undoubted scriptural truth, that all Christians are, in virtue of their Baptism, priests, and that all therefore are bound to join and bear their part in the spiritual sacrifices which are offered to God in His Church. The practice of Romanists and Dissenters, by which the clergy or officials recite the whole Office, obscures this precious and important truth ; our practice as members of the Church of England ought to bear testimony to it. But besides this, there is in us, our nature being composite, a strange mysterious sympathy between the outward and the inward, which makes us dependent for the life and energy of our spirits upon the little outward symptoms and accidents of our position. Our bodies expand or contract according to the temperature of the atmosphere which surrounds them ; and our minds in a spiritual atmosphere, which makes itself felt in just the same subtle and delicate way as the natural atmosphere, observe the same law. If persons around us in the congregation are merely silent auditors of the Service, not active participators in it ; much more, if they are careless, slovenly, and indevout, our own devotion is instantaneously chilled, and, as it were, thrown inward. If, on the other hand, they have all the appearance of earnest worshippers, devotion soon stirs and wakens up in our own heart, much as a frozen snake will move, and uncoil itself, and rear its crest, when brought near the fire. Throw, then, your contribution of heart, and soul, and sympathy into the

Service of the Church, by making the responses simply, and sincerely, in your natural voice. Berridge seems to have understood well the great charm of congregational worship, when he thus writes respecting the mutual salutation of the priest and people, as given in his own little Church at Everton :

“ When I say, ‘ The Lord be with you,’ I love to hear their murmur of response breaking forth from all corners of the Church, ‘ And with thy spirit.’ It reminds me of those words of the Revelation, descriptive of the worship of the redeemed at the marriage supper of the Lamb : ‘ I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of many thunderings, saying, Alleluia ! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.’ The Dissenters have nothing to compare with it.”

It should be our ambition to bring the worship of the Church Militant into as close a resemblance with that of the Church Triumphant as our circumstances will admit. To this great result each one may contribute something by bringing to Church a thoughtful and prepared mind, a devout heart, and a humble voice. Let but a few worshippers do this, and oftener than we think we shall seem to intercept an echo of that sinless and perfect Worship which is ever carried on above.

We have spoken of the agreement of the members of Christ’s Body, as that which gives its character to Public Worship. But what are the members without the Head ? Only so many bricks of an arch without a key-stone. There can be no agreement without the Head : for it is the Head which holds the members together, not in unity only, but in existence. Not therefore without a very profound connexion of thought does Our Lord thus complete the passage, upon which

we have been founding our remarks: "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in Heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them."

There is great significance in the "For." He would have us to understand that it is His Presence in the midst of the two or three gathered together in His Name, which lends all the efficacy to their petitions. The High Priest, He would say, is in the midst of the worshippers, whose functions of Atonement and Intercession are the alone procuring cause of the acceptance of their prayers. Then our last practical recommendation shall be that, as in Private Prayer our thoughts are turned to that God who seeth in secret, so in Public Worship we should seek to realize a rather more definite conception of the Presence of the Incarnate God. The human presence visibly around us in the Church is the pledge, the token, the Sacrament of His. He is among them in all the sympathies of His Humanity, in all the glories of His Divinity, in all the precious virtues of His Mediatorial Work. And it will be found useful, before the commencement of the Service, and at any of the necessary breaks which occur in the course of it, to occupy the mind with the thought of His Presence. The apprehension of it, and nothing short of the apprehension of it, will impart to Public Worship a mingled sweetness and solemnity, which will constrain us to exclaim with the Psalmist: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord. Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee."



## CHAPTER IX.

ON SELF-RECOLLECTEDNESS AND EJACULATORY  
PRAYER.

**"Pray without ceasing."**—1 THESS. v. 13.

THE Apostle bids us "pray without ceasing." Yet of our Blessed Lord, the great model, as of every other virtue, so also of Prayer, it is expressly said by the Evangelist St. Luke that, "as He was praying in a certain place, *He ceased.*" The precept and the Example are capable of an easy reconciliation. When it is said that Christ ceased from prayer, it is meant that He ceased from stated prayer, from prayer offered probably upon His knees. When St. Paul exhorts us to "pray without ceasing," he means that we should maintain unbroken the soul's communion with God.

Prayer is to be regarded not only as a distinct exercise of Religion, for which its own time must be set apart, but as a process woven into the texture of the Christian's mind, and extending through the length and breadth of his life. Like the golden thread in a tissue, it frequently disappears beneath the common threads. It disappears, and is hidden from the eye; yet nevertheless, it is substantially there, like a stream running underground for a certain period of its course. Suddenly, the thread emerges into sight again on the upper surface of the tissue, and suddenly again disappears; and thus it penetrates the whole texture, although occasionally hidden. This is a very just illustration of the matter in hand. Look from without upon the Christian's life, and you will see divers occu-

pations and employments, many of which, it may be, call for the exercise of his mind. But beneath the mind's surface there is an undercurrent, a golden thread of Prayer, always there, though often latent, and frequently rising up to view not only in stated acts of worship, but in holy ejaculations. We are now passing from the consideration of the devotional life of the Christian to that of his practical life, and we make Ejaculatory Prayer the bridge to the latter part of our great subject, because it is the exercise by which business and devotion are interlaced one with another.

Prayer has been truly called the Christian's breath of life. The image applies to Prayer in that broad sense of the word in which the Apostle bids us pray without ceasing, and we cannot gain a better insight into the meaning of the precept, than by developing it a little.

Let us consider, then, the process of natural life. It is carried on by an unintermitted series of inhalations and exhalations. The air is drawn inwards first, and fills the lungs, and then thrown out again, that fresh may be taken in.

Similarly, Mental Prayer consists of two processes; recollecting or gathering up the mind, and breathing it out towards God. The first is to enter into the closet of the heart, and shut the door upon all but God. The second is to pray to our Father, which is in secret.

1. To recollect or gather up the mind, is to summon it in from its wanderings (as a shepherd drives home to the fold a stray sheep), and to place it consciously in God's Presence. God, though present every where, has His special residence, as being a pure Spirit, in our minds. "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." He is somewhere in the recesses of the soul, in the springs of our existence, in that mysterious, dark,

his whole soul into the request. And, lo, it is done! The blessing descends, prosecuted, overtaken, pierced, fetched down from the vault of Heaven by the winged arrow of Prayer. Do you require Scriptural proof that such immediate answers are occasionally vouchsafed, even as regards mere earthly blessings, to "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man?" The proof is ready to our hand. Nehemiah, the cup-bearer, stood with a sad countenance before Artaxerxes the king. The king seemed offended by his sadness, unexplained as it was by any cause with which the king could sympathize. Nehemiah knew what Solomon had written long ago, that "the king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion,"—that to offend an oriental despot is all one with having the scimitar suspended over one's head, or the bow-string slung around one's neck. So "he was very sore afraid." The king asked him expressly what would content him. This made the case worse, for Nehemiah had a large request to make, which might seem to the king extravagant and presumptuous. The cup-bearer was in a great strait. What did he do? He entered into the closet of his heart, and shut his door, and prayed to his Father which was in secret. "I prayed," says he, "to the God of heaven." To offer prayer under such circumstances evinces command of mind. Not many seconds can elapse between a question in conversation and the answer to it; and when one feels that every thing is suspended on the success of the answer, anxiety and excitement would combine to prevent the offering of prayer in that brief interval. But Nehemiah had disciplined his mind to watch and pray, and he made the most of the interval, such as it was. It is hardly conceivable that he can have said more mentally than "Lord, help me according to my need;" but then

he said it with such a fervour of heart, and such an entire faith that God *would* help him, that it was as successful as if he had spent a whole night in prayer. He candidly explained his wishes, in answer to the king; and down came the blessing immediately. The king's cloudy brow cleared all of a sudden, like a storm in an April day. He took the request very graciously, and the all-important crisis for Nehemiah, and for the city of his fathers, passed off well. "So it pleased the king to send me." One short act of the mind, one strong shaft of Prayer, had won the restoration of the Holy City, the joy of the whole earth.

But Ejaculatory Prayer is to be used not simply in difficulties, and when our affairs are in a critical posture, though such circumstances most especially call for it, but from time to time, all along the course of the day. But here some difficulty will be felt by those who strive to adopt the practice.

When the mind is under the pressure of anxiety or alarm, then, of course, there is a ready supply of materials for our petitions, and the only difficulty is the attainment of sufficient presence of mind to offer them. The compilers of our Liturgy, as feeling, I suppose, that in extraordinary emergencies this presence of mind soon deserts ordinary men, and that in such a case forms might steady the mind, and help it forward in the direction in which it wished to travel, have supplied in "The Forms of Prayer to be used at Sea," certain ejaculations for individuals, under the circumstances of a sea-fight or a storm, which, like all other parts of the Liturgy, are simple and appropriate, and which should be mentioned here, because they form our Church's testimony to the value and importance of Ejaculatory Prayer; but in common and uneventful life the mind will